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contemporary living.*

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# Editorial The Church as a Peacemaker

The horrendous fact of our time is the escalation of violence; whether viewed in the light of millions of abortions, multiplying tribal, racial or religious wars, or the mounting threat of nuclear holocaust. The world is spending a million dollars a minute on war and the arms race while one-fifth of the human race live in starvation and inhuman living conditions. Christians are faced with moral choices that were inconceivable to an earlier generation. In our global crises, a biblical realism of judgement and hope demands that Christians re-examine their theological systems and their ethical assumptions. A confused ethic all too often reflects a truncated theology that fragments the Gospel into neat water-tight compartments. We hide behind our eschatological hope.

Today there are many claimants to world peace and justice. Islam with its claim of religious superiority offers its *shar'iah* law of moral absolutes and detailed rules for daily living, while Marxism offers an ideology pledged to 'the consolidation and flowering of the world socialist system'. The NATO and Warsaw Alliances offer peace through nuclear deterrents to a world threatened with self-annihilation.

What has the Church to offer? To his disciples Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called sons of God'. How realistic is it for the church to be a peace maker between nations and peoples? Only if she is true to her spiritual and moral nature and willing to follow her Lord in his mission in the world. Only a reforming and a renewed Church will have the inner moral power to rebuke evil, to break down suspicion and hatred between peoples and to build confidence in peace and justice between nations. Unless the Church is both salt and light it can be neither the conscience of the nations nor the hope of eternal salvation for a transformed society. But first the Church must know the way of the Cross—God's power through human powerlessness and suffering. It must participate in the miraculous power of prayer. It must be a peace maker to its own fragmented community before it can be a peace maker to the world. The Church must believe and obey the whole Gospel. The WEF Theological Commission is beginning to address itself to these global issues. 'The Gospel speaks to the Nations' is the expected theme of its next plenary meeting—scheduled for June 27–July 2 1986 at Singapore. Some of the articles and reviews in this issue of ERT speak to this agenda. [p. 200](#)

## The Limits of Dynamic Equivalence in Bible Translation

D. A. Carson

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*In this article the author welcomes the careful use of dynamic equivalent principles in Bible translation but warns against the abuses of applying the principle beyond the limits of linguistic priorities and of absolutizing the dichotomy between meaning and message. Readers' response to these issues is welcomed.*

(Editor)

Generally speaking, a newly minted expression no sooner triumphs, capturing a revered place in an ever widening circle of users, than it is debased. Its very triumph almost ensures its defeat, especially if it is a clever, catchy, quasi-technical term, for its very popularity will prompt many to use it even though they do not possess any deep understanding of the setting which called it into being or of the limitations of its original context.

## THE TRIUMPH OF DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE TRANSLATIONS

So it is with 'dynamic equivalence.' As far as those who struggle with biblical translation are concerned, dynamic equivalence has won the day—and rightly so. Its victory is hailed by many signs of the times. There is widespread recognition of the dismal inadequacy of merely formal equivalence in translation, buttressed by thousands and thousands of examples. Undergirding such recognition is the belated understanding that terms such as 'literal translation' and 'paraphrase' are steeped in ambiguity, and in any case belong, not in mutually exclusive categories, but on the same spectrum:<sup>1</sup> a 'too-literal' translation can be as bad as a 'too-paraphrastic' translation, if for different reasons. Few translators of any competence would today deny such fundamental sets of priorities as the following:

(1) contextual consistency has priority over verbal consistency (or word-for-word concordance), (2) dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence, (3) the aural (heard) form of language has priority over the written form, (4) forms that are used by and acceptable to the audience for p. 201 which a translation is intended have priority over forms that may be traditionally more prestigious.<sup>2</sup>

Dynamic equivalence displays its triumph in the publishing houses, in the continuing parade of multiplying helps,<sup>3</sup> front rank research,<sup>4</sup> manuals of problems,<sup>5</sup> reflective textbooks,<sup>6</sup> assorted popularizations<sup>7</sup> and sane assessments of recent translations.<sup>8</sup> Missiologists are now comfortable with classifications of languages based not on their

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<sup>1</sup> On the 'spectrum' nature of translations, see for instance John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 19–32; Eugene H. Glassman, *The Translation Debate: What Makes a Bible Translation Good?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981) 23–34.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974) 14.

<sup>3</sup> We may think, for instance, of the growing list of handbooks/commentaries for translators, published by UBS.

<sup>4</sup> It is risky to single out individual items for special praise. However, representing quite different contributions, one may think of recent developments in discourse analysis; of sophisticated and creative individual essays like that of Kenneth L. Pike, 'Agreement Types Dispersed into a Nine-Cell Spectrum,' along with other contributions to *On Language, Culture and Religion*, ed. Matthew Black and William A. Smalley (The Hague: Mouton, 1974) 275–286; of developments in computer software that are promising new and sophisticated lexical, grammatical and syntactical concordances.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Mildred Larson, *A Manual for Problem Solving in Bible Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Nida/Taber, *Theory and Practice*; William L. Wonderly, *Bible Translations for Popular Use* (London: UBS, 1968); and many others.

<sup>7</sup> The list is so long that it cannot be registered here. Many articles in *The Bible Translator* fit into this category.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Sakae Kubo and Walter Specht, *So Many Versions? Twentieth Century English Versions of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

roots (e.g. Indo-European, Semitic) as on their use (or non-use) in literature and education (primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary), and they have become sensitive to the differences between translating the Bible in an ‘overlap language’ (one in which the colloquial and the literary forms of the language overlap significantly, e.g. English) and translating the Bible almost exclusively at a literary level (e.g. Arabic).<sup>9</sup> As they have been sensitized to the kinds of readers, so they sympathize with the very different linguistic needs of diverse readers within any particular language or dialect. There is a new appreciation for the work of the receptor-language stylist in the translation process;<sup>10</sup> and in the best seminaries, lecturers in Greek and Hebrew p. 202 take extra pains to convey a literary feel for the biblical languages, no less than the rudiments of their grammar. Even unreconstructed grammarians such as myself, thoroughly convinced that a profound and growing knowledge of the donor languages is a great *desideratum* in Bible translation, are no less concerned to expose their students to the elements of modern linguistic theory and practice. At least in part, all of this has come about because dynamic equivalence, rightly understood, is essential for good translation. Only the linguistically incompetent would today argue that the translator needs facility in the languages with which he or she is working, but not understanding of the content of the text. At its best, dynamic equivalence, far from jeopardizing good translation, is essential for fidelity in translation<sup>11</sup>—fidelity in conveying meaning, tone, emotional impact, naturalness/awkwardness and much more.

## THE POTENTIAL FOR ABUSE

Unfortunately, now that ‘dynamic equivalence’ is so popular, it is not infrequently abused. I hasten to add that the most careful scholars in the field do not err in this way. What is still one of the finest books in the area, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, by Nida and Taber,<sup>12</sup> abounds in wise and sensitive caveats. For example, the translator is carefully warned against trying to get behind the biblical writer, or ahead of him;<sup>13</sup> and he is cautioned not to confuse linguistic translation with ‘cultural translation,’ transforming the Pharisees and Sadducees, for instance, into present-day religious parties.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the historical particularity of the text is to be respected.

But sadly, similar care is not shown by all. The caveats and restrictions which make dynamic equivalence so useful a way of thinking about translation are sometimes overlooked or abandoned; and this route has become progressively easier to follow as professional missiologists have come to think of contextualization in highly diverse

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<sup>9</sup> See the popular summary by Eugene A. Nida, ‘Bible Translation for the Eighties,’ *International Review of Mission* 70 (1981) 132–133.

<sup>10</sup> Nida, *ibid.* 136–137, goes so far as to recommend that Bible translation teams consider adopting the procedure of United Nations and European Common Market translation departments, whose *first* drafts are produced by stylists of the receptor language, the specialists checking their work as a second step (instead of the inverse order).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Beekman/Callow, *Translating* 33–44.

<sup>12</sup> As in n.2, *supra*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 12–13.

ways,<sup>15</sup> and as such theoretical developments as the new p. 203 hermeneutic and what might be called philosophical structuralism have made their own impact on the translator and his art.<sup>16</sup> Such developments are so complex I dare not broach them here, except tangentially. But it may be useful to offer a number of reflections on dynamic equivalence and related concepts, reflections which may help translators avoid the pitfalls inherent in some of these developments. It is worth insisting one more time, at the outset, that the best practitioners of dynamic equivalence have always observed the contents of this list, even if they might not phrase their positions this way. In other words, I am not surreptitiously advocating the overthrow of the principles of dynamic equivalence, but rather encouraging clarity of thought and the adoption of necessary caveats.

## LIMITS TO EQUIVALENCE OF RESPONSE

The most common descriptions of ‘dynamic equivalence,’ as insightful as they are, must be guarded against as having considerable potential for abuse. In a work now considered a classic, Nida describes ‘dynamic equivalence translation’ as the ‘closest natural equivalent to the source-language message’ and insists it is ‘directed primarily toward equivalence of response rather than equivalence of form.’<sup>17</sup> Again:

Dynamic equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language. This response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose.<sup>18</sup>

Or, as Mundhenk remarks, ‘In the final analysis, a translation is good or bad, right or wrong, in terms of how the reader understands and reacts.’<sup>18</sup>

I have no quarrel with these quotations, all three of which stress equivalence of response, *as long as they are referring to linguistic priorities alone*. Clearly, a translation is poor if by preserving formal equivalence in word order or syntactical construction or the like it p. 204 obscures the meaning of the original text, or transmutes it into something quite different, or remains completely opaque to those whose tongue is the receptor language. Moreover, selecting appropriate linguistic priorities requires a sensitive knowledge of the receptor culture, since there may be cultural associations between linguistic constructions and cultural values such that an entirely false impression is conveyed—false, that is to say, as measured by what was originally conveyed. ‘Blessed is the man who does not ... stand in the way of sinners’ (Psa. 1:1, NIV) is a shockingly poor rendering of the Hebrew, because ‘to stand in someone’s way’ in English means ‘to hinder

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<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, the discussions by David Hesselgrave (along with the responses, and his rejoinder), ‘The Contextualization Continuum,’ *Gospel in Context* 2/3 (July, 1979) 4–26; and James O. Buswell, III, ‘Contextualization: Theory, Tradition and Method,’ *Theology and Mission: Papers Given at Trinity Consultation No. 1* ed. David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 87–111.

<sup>16</sup> Bibliography in these areas is extensive. The most significant contributions are listed in D. A. Carson, ‘Hermeneutics: A brief assessment of some recent trends,’ *Themelios* 5/2 (January 1980) 12–20, to which must be added the excellent work by A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

<sup>17</sup> Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964) 166.

<sup>18</sup> Nida/Taber, *Theory and Practice* 24.

<sup>18</sup> Nida/Taber, *Theory and Practice* 24.

someone,' whereas the thought in Hebrew is 'to walk in someone's footsteps,' 'to walk in someone's moccasins' or, less metaphorically, 'to adopt someone else's lifestyle and values and habits.' There are far more difficult cases discussed in the standard texts; and, as pursued by a linguistics expert such as Nida, 'dynamic equivalence' is surely in these cases an eminently worthwhile goal which no one competent in two or more languages would wish to gainsay.

Nevertheless, there are several ways in which the expression 'dynamic equivalence' can easily be abused. Perhaps it is best to provide illustrations of several kinds of abuse; and, to focus discussion, I shall draw them from the writings of Charles Kraft. *First*, it is increasingly common so to focus on the 'response' aspect of dynamic equivalence that several weighty matters are overlooked. At the extreme, the resulting 'versions' may be called 'transculturations' (to use the language of Kraft).<sup>20</sup>

Kraft acknowledges, 'In a translation it is inappropriate to give the impression that Jesus walked the streets of Berkeley or London or Nairobi. But a transculturation, in order to reach its target audience effectively, may do exactly that.'<sup>21</sup> These transculturations 'dare to be *specific to their audiences and free to be true to God's imperative to communicate rather than simply to impress*. In this they demonstrate the deep concern of their authors for the total communicational situation, not simply for one or another aspect of it.'<sup>22</sup> Kraft then goes on to suggest (as he does elsewhere) that those who disagree with his p. 205 diagnosis and react negatively against 'proper transculturation' are the modern equivalents of the 'orthodox' retainers of the old cultural forms' against whom Jesus 'waged a running battle for culturally relevant transculturation,' or of the 'orthodox' Judaizers of [Acts 15](#).<sup>23</sup>

These assessments raise a host of issues. A glimpse of them may be afforded by a series of questions: Did Jesus primarily or even marginally set himself against the Jewish religious leaders of his day out of concern for the transculturation of an agreed message, or out of a fundamental break with his opponents' understanding of Scripture? How much of his disagreement stemmed from their failure to perceive the new developments on the salvation-historical plane, his claims to fulfill Old Testament expectations concerning the coming of the Messiah? How valid, logically speaking, is the constant disjunction Kraft raises between his own approach to 'dynamic-equivalence transculturation' and a kind of incompetent fixation upon mere content devoid of desire and/or ability to communicate? Is the disjunction essentially fair, or does it approach caricature?

When we say we aim to generate the same response in the readers of the receptor language as in the readers of the donor language, what do we mean? Suppose the readers of the original New Testament document were largely alienated by the truth of what Paul wrote: should we aim to reproduce similar alienation today, in order to preserve 'equivalence of response'? Can we expect *exactly* the same response among the urban, secularized, twentieth century readers of Leviticus or of Romans as their respective first readers? Is it not better, if we are going to define 'dynamic equivalence' in terms of equivalent response, to understand such equivalence in linguistic categories, i.e. in terms of the removal of as many as possible of the false linguistic barriers (along with the

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<sup>20</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979) 276–290. Note that Kraft titles this chapter 'Dynamic-Equivalence Transculturation of the Message.'

<sup>21</sup> Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 284.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 286 (emphasis is Kraft's).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 287.



associations each linguistic category carries) which actually impede the communication of truth?

Each of these questions could easily generate its own paper; and one or two of them will re-emerge in subsequent points. I think it is clear, however, that the hidden fallacy against which many of these questions are directed is the unwitting assumption that 'response' is the *ultimate* category in translation. Strictly speaking, that is not true; theologically speaking, it is unwise; evangelistically speaking, it is uncontrolled, not to say dangerous. I hasten to add that I am not surreptitiously supporting obscurity in translation or obscurantism in scholarship. The concerns Kraft is feeling are real ones, and need addressing. My criticism is more fundamental: his solution, the p. 206 elevation of response above truth, fails precisely in the areas where it claims to be strong, for the response is *not* rendered equivalent by such means as he advances. The aim of a good translation is to convey the total content—informational, emotional, connotational etc.—of the original message to the reader (or 'hearer,' where the translation is read publicly) in the secondary language.

### LIMITS OF EQUIVALENCE OF THEOLOGIZING

We read in contemporary literature on missiology of 'dynamic equivalence theologizing'<sup>24</sup> and 'dynamic-equivalence churches.'<sup>25</sup> Once again, the concerns behind these labels are real. For example, biblically faulty and/or culturally myopic ecclesiastical structures may be imposed on a mission church as if the entire blue-print were handed down from heaven, complete with robes for the choir and Roberts' Rules of Order. Nevertheless, all such evils are better addressed without talking of 'dynamic equivalence churches,' because: (a) As the expression is used by its inventor, social custom becomes so controlling a feature that the Scriptures are not permitted to reform society. Kraft appeals to the Kru of Liberia who state that 'You cannot trust a man with only one wife,'<sup>26</sup> concluding that Kru church leadership need not be monogamous, despite Paul's strictures on this point. Kraft thinks that eventually polygamy would likely die out among the Kru, 'Just as, through God's interaction with the Hebrews, polygamy died out in Hebrew culture—over the course of a few thousand years.'<sup>27</sup> Until then, polygamy should be tolerated. There seems to be, from Kraft's examples, few things which the Bible seems clearly to demand of church structure, which could not be jettisoned in favor of 'dynamic-equivalence churches.' (b) More important, the extension of the expression 'dynamic equivalence' into areas far removed not only from linguistic priorities but also from translation itself reflects back on problems of translation and muddies otherwise clear distinctions. In the name of an ill-defined and infinitely plastic 'dynamic equivalence,' almost any translational aberration may be justified. P. 207

### LIMITS TO THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN MEANING AND MESSAGE

Whereas the expression 'dynamic equivalence' started out as a category belonging to the realm of translation and set in opposition to various kinds of linguistic formalism, the

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<sup>24</sup> This is the title of chapter 15 of Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Charles H. Kraft, 'Dynamic Equivalence Churches,' *Missiology* 1 (1979) 39–57.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 54.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



extension of its use to far broader issues is currently being grounded in a variety of faddish theoretical constructs which do not stand up to rigorous scholarship but which are cited with ill-deserved authority as if the subjects with which they deal were closed—e.g. the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis,<sup>28</sup> the New Hermeneutic,<sup>29</sup> and some recent communication theory. The first, in its crudest form, makes human beings the determined captives of their language, and their language becomes a guide to their ‘social reality.’ The second, in its extreme form, calls in question the possibility of objective knowledge as text and interpreter progressively ‘interpret’ one another, without *terminus*, lost in profound relativity. The third, conjoined with structuralism, insists that there is a rigid dichotomy between meaning and message. All three of these notions, wittingly or unwittingly, lie not far from the surface of the following lines:

Contemporary understandings contend that a major difference between messages and meanings lie in the fact that messages can be transmitted in linguistic form while meanings exist only in the hearts and minds of people. Contemporary communiologists (*sic*) see communicators with meanings in their minds that they would like to transmit to receptors. Communicators take these meanings and formulate them, usually in linguistic form, into messages which they then transmit to receptors. Receptors then, listen to the messages and construct within their minds sets of meanings that may or may not correspond with the meanings intended by the communicator.

Meanings, therefore, do not pass from me to you, only messages. The meanings exist only within me or within you.... The messages, then, serve as stimulators rather than as containers. Receptors, in response to the stimulus of messages construct meanings that may or may not correspond to what the communicator intended.<sup>30</sup>

There is considerable insight here, of course. Each man is finite in his understanding, and the potential for misunderstanding increases when the message is translated. Communicators do not always say exactly what they mean, and the best communicators will try to encourage the p. 208 feedback necessary to discover whether their meaning has been absorbed by the receptors. Nevertheless, as stated these lines present their case too disjunctively. *Some* ‘contemporary understandings contend that there is a major difference between messages and meanings’, but others, while recognizing that any individual communication may be imperfectly grasped, nevertheless insist that the message/meaning disjunction, taken absolutely, is one form of the intentional fallacy, that human beings cannot entertain complex meanings without propositions, and that therefore meaning and message, though not identical, cannot be divided absolutely, that the commonality of our creaturehood in the image of God makes verbal communication less problematic than some think; that even participant knowledge can be verbalized among those who share common participant experience (whether sex or knowing God); that the individual can ‘fuse’ his ‘horizon of understanding’ with the ‘horizon of understanding’ of the communicator in order to assure *true* understanding of the message, even if it may not be *exhaustive* understanding; that meanings can and do pass from one person to the other; that messages are neither mere stimulators nor mere communicators, but the very stuff of the meaning, insofar as the two individuals share semantic ranges and the like, and insofar as the communicator says what he means.

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<sup>28</sup> For a recent discussion, see Harry Hoijer, ‘The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis,’ *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, ed. Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1972) 114–123.

<sup>29</sup> See above, n. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Charles H. Kraft, ‘Communicating the Gospel God’s Way,’ *Ashland Theological Bulletin* 12 (1979) 34–35.

Much more needs to be said on this first, difficult point, but this sketch must serve to remind us that adherence to 'dynamic equivalence' as a linguistic principle in translation does not commit one to a considerable conceptual baggage increasingly common in the literature.

## LIMITS TO THE EQUIVALENCE OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

Dynamic equivalence must not be permitted to override the historical particularity of the Bible. There is a sense in which any text is historically conditioned. Even in the case of proverbs and aphorisms, those most timeless of literary forms, some examples will prove more easily adaptable than others. 'Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him' ([Proverbs 26:12](#)) is likely to be coherent in most languages; 'Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife' ([Proverbs 25:24](#)) presupposes flat roofs frequented by humans, not snow-shedding sloped roofs never visited except to replace a gutter or a TV aerial. The problem becomes much more difficult when we leave aphorism and come to narrative. The problems of equivalence can be grouped under the headings (1) ecology, (2) material culture, (3) social culture, (4) **p. 209** religious culture, and (5) linguistic culture.<sup>31</sup> There is no simple way to categorize the possible solutions; and the problems are very diverse. An Eskimo tribe reads a Bible that speaks of desert and lions; a Mexican tribe in Yucatan has never experienced the four seasons typical of temperate zones (cf. [Mark 13:28](#)). If we follow TEV's 'police' or NEB's 'constable' in [Matthew 5:25](#), are we not unwittingly fostering images of a gun-toting officer or an English bobby? Perhaps these cases don't matter; perhaps 'police' is acceptable. But many cases have stings in the tail. If for instance we replace 'recline at food' or 'recline at table' with 'sit down to eat', we are going to have a tough job imagining how John managed to get his head on Jesus' breast. Preservation of descriptions of what is to us an alien custom, reclining at tables, makes it possible to understand a later action, John placing his head on Jesus' breast.

I am not now dealing with such obvious distortions as 'this is the essence of all true religion' ([Matthew 7:12](#), Phillips) for 'this sums up the Law and the Prophets' (NIV), or 'then a diabolical plan came into the mind of Judas' ([Luke 22:3](#), Phillips) for 'Then Satan entered Judas' (NIV). Rather, what interests me at this juncture is that God has revealed himself to men in time-space history—to particular men and women, spatially and temporally and linguistically located. If we are not very cautious about the way we treat the historical particulars, we may introduce such substantive anachronisms that the story becomes intrinsically unbelievable—especially as the receptor tribe grows in understanding and historical awareness. There are ways of overcoming the obscurity intrinsic in references to customs and experiences unknown on receptor soil—for instance, Scripture notes and teachers (further discussed below), and meanwhile, we must ask how much we are losing when we remove too many indicators of historical and cultural 'distance.' How such problems are resolved may depend to some extent on the literary stage of development of the receptor group, but even if the group is coming across the printed page for the first time, and enjoys virtually no comprehension of cultures other than their own, it must be remembered that this receptor group will likely use this new translation of the Bible for decades to come, maybe a century or two. During all of that time, an increasing number of this receptor people will be exposed to new cultures and education. How well will the Bible translation serve then? Christianity is a religion **p.**

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<sup>31</sup> Eugene Nida, 'Linguistics and Ethnology in Translation: Problems,' *Word* 1 (1945) 196.

210 whose roots are deeply imbedded in the particularities of history, and our translations must not obscure that fact.

## LIMITS TO THE EQUIVALENCE OF SALVATION HISTORY

Dynamic equivalence must not be permitted to mask the development of and internal relations within salvation history. Suppose, for instance, a tribe has a long tradition of sacrificing pigs, but has never so much as heard of sheep. Is it in that case justifiable to render [John 1:29](#), 'Look, the swine of God, who takes away the sin of the world!?' I would argue strongly in the negative, not only because of the importance of historical particularity, defended in the last point, but because of the plethora of rich allusions preserved in Scripture across the sweep of salvation history. In what sense does Jesus 'fulfill' the Old Testament sacrificial system if that system sacrificed lambs on the Day of Atonement and at Passover, whereas Jesus is portrayed as a swine? How then will [John 1:29](#) relate to [Isa 52:13–53:12](#), the fourth servant song, or to images of the warrior lamb in the Apocalypse (e.g. [Revelation 5:6](#))? Shall we change *all* such references to 'pigs' ('All we like swine have gone astray...')? And if so, do we then make the biblical pig-references clean, and designate some other animal unclean? No; it is surely simpler to preserve 'lamb' in the first instance. If this involves inventing a new word, so be it: a brief note could explain that the word refers to an animal frequently sacrificed by the people of the Bible, along with a succinct description of the animal's characteristics.

There is a second way in which appeal to dynamic equivalence must not be permitted to mask the development and internal relations of salvation history. We have witnessed a negative example in Kraft's appeal to polygamy under the old covenant. What Kraft never struggles with is the nature of the continuity/discontinuity pattern when moving from old covenant to new. One can no more make legitimate appeal to the Old Testament to support polygamy among Christian leaders than one can appeal to the OT to defend continued Christian maintenance of all dietary laws. The fact that Christians disagree over certain details on the continuity/discontinuity pattern is no justification for the failure to wrestle with the issue when dealing with something as sensitive in parts of Africa as is polygamy.<sup>32</sup> p. 211

## THE NECESSITY FOR GOOD EXEGETES AND GRAMMARIANS

In the light of these observations, I am inclined, somewhat hesitantly, to call in question the judgment of Nida and others, who argue that good exegetes and grammarians make poor translators.<sup>33</sup> Increasingly, they say that translation projects should begin with stylists who enjoy some marginal knowledge of Greek and Hebrew but who are competent in the receptor language and permit the specialists their say only at the cleaning up stage.

Quite clearly the gifts and training of the stylists are necessary. But I wonder if grammarians and exegetes are dismissed too rapidly. Most field translators for such organizations as Wycliffe Bible Translators and the American Bible Society have one theological degree, perhaps two—i.e. two or three years (i.e. four to six semester courses) of Greek, and perhaps half that of Hebrew. Their problem, it may be, is not that they have

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<sup>32</sup> For a detailed attempt to wrestle with problems of continuity and discontinuity, with substantial implications for the topic at hand, see D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>33</sup> Most recently, Nida argues the point in 'Bible Translation for the Eighties,' 136–137.

too much Greek, but too little. I would go further, and suggest that even many teachers of Greek and Hebrew in colleges, seminaries and universities do not enjoy much facility in the language. These are precisely the kind of people who are least likely to be sensitive to the demands of ‘dynamic equivalence.’ How often, for example, have I taken second year Greek students aside and explained at length how rarely a Greek participle should be rendered by an English participle, how many of the Greek connectives must find no equivalent in an English word but in the flow of English style, and so forth. And I have learned that it is my *best* students in advanced exegesis and advanced grammar courses who learn such flexibility most thoroughly. To be good translators, they would benefit from further study in linguistics and in literary style; but at a guess, advanced competence in the donor languages will not prove a hindrance but a strength in most cases, *provided the teacher is aware* of the linguistic complexities and subtleties that surround translation.

The reason I have suggested this alternative theory—and I admit it is only theory—is because the drift in many academic circles is toward so great a flexibility in translation that, as we have seen, ‘communication’ becomes an ideal abstracted from the message to be communicated, and new voices loudly insist there is an impregnable wedge between the meaning of the donor and the meaning of the receptor. To provide safeguards against these erroneous positions, we must encourage translators not only to pursue studies in linguistics and [p. 212](#) style, but to steep themselves in the languages, history, culture, symbolism, genre and theology of the biblical documents. Only then is it possible to ‘fuse horizons’ with high reliability, and counteract the growing tide of relativism and arbitrariness.

Although ‘dynamic equivalence’ is an important component of translation, we should tone down our claims for what it can achieve. Precisely because dynamic equivalence is customarily described in terms of equivalent response, we are in danger of leaving the impression that, provided we get our translations right, we can practically guarantee a massive turning to Christ. We have no place for an Ethiopian eunuch who needed someone to explain a grammatically clear text, no place for the hardness of the human heart ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)), no place for the work of the Holy Spirit, no consideration of a rapidly growing and alarming set of secular presuppositions around the world, both within the church and outside it.<sup>34</sup> Do not the Scriptures themselves encourage us to multiply the number of evangelists, pastors/teachers and other workers, thereby discouraging the notion that the *entire* task depends exclusively on the quality of the Bible translation used? This is not to justify obscure translations on the basis of, say, total depravity or the like: if people do not understand the Word of God, let it not be because we have lacked wisdom in our task as translators. Yet in our defence of dynamic equivalence, we should, especially at the popular level, curb our exuberance, lest we jeopardize our credibility by the extravagance of our claims. The proper use of dynamic equivalence translations decreases the likelihood of misunderstanding arising from poor translation, but it is not a universal spiritual panacea.

## THE USE AND LIMITS OF STUDY NOTES

I have at several points suggested that it is better to preserve the historical distance of the original text and to provide an explanatory note. This raises the question of the place of study notes and study Bibles. Nida and Taber offer several wise observations in this regard. Perhaps my favorite is that ‘it is best at least to make sense in the text and put the

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<sup>34</sup> See, *inter alia*, William D. Reyburn, ‘Secular Culture, Missions, and Spiritual Values,’ *On Language, Culture, and Religion*, ed. Matthew Black and William A. Smalley (The Hague: Mouton, 1974) 287–299.

scholarly caution in the margin, rather than to make nonsense in the text and offer the excuse in the margin.’<sup>35</sup>

But my purpose here is to offer a further caution. Because I do not [p. 213](#) think that, by and large, dynamic equivalence should override the distancing that stems both from historical particularism and from the history of redemption, I favor a fairly liberal use of notes explaining cultural, religious, ecological and linguistic points, especially in Bibles designed for groups made up largely of first readers who therefore have very little knowledge of the world outside their own setting. But great pains should be taken to make those notes as ‘neutral’ and as objective as possible. Theological notes, hortatory comments, notes explaining the flow, homiletical hints—all should be relegated to separate books. The impetus for this judgment is twofold: (a) In this way are we less likely to impose on the new converts the details of a theological framework that may be in some measure faulty, or perhaps with emphases tangential to their perceived world. (b) I grew up in Québec where, at the time, if Roman Catholics would read the Bible at all, it would be with Roman Catholic notes (such as the Léger version of the New Testament). I witnessed first hand how such notes could brainwash a people. Even when theoretical allowance is made for the distinction between text and note, the constant re-reading of both on the same page in practice blurs this distinction and shapes the theological convictions of the reader. What applies to the Léger version applies *mutatis mutandis* to the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, the *Ryrie Study Bible* and half a dozen others. It would be good to avoid transmitting our mistakes in this area to the mission fields where Bibles are appearing in new languages for the first time. Equally, it would be good to remember that the God of the Bible ordained that there would be evangelists and teachers in his church. Translation of the Scriptures is not the only thing needed for adequate communication of the gospel: God has equally mandated the training and deployment of evangelists and pastor/teachers. Failure to account for this aspect of our task may unwittingly encourage a ‘translation’ that is to some degree a perceived *replacement* of human agents.

In observing such qualifications on ‘dynamic equivalence’ as the ones I have suggested in this article, perhaps we shall retard the debasement of the expression now in progress, and, more important, encourage reliable translation of the Word of God.<sup>36</sup>

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## Culture and Coherence in Christian History

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<sup>35</sup> *Theory and Practice* 30.

<sup>36</sup> After completing this paper, I was loaned (by Dr. David Hesselgrave) the latest book by Eugene A. Nida and William D. Reymann, *Meaning Across Cultures* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981). I am delighted to say that they raise somewhat similar warnings and, with far more linguistic competence at their disposal than I have, provide numerous colorful examples.



# A. F. Walls

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*In broad sketches Professor Walls discusses the transmission of Christianity across cultural frontiers through six eras of Christian history and the transforming effect each has had on Christianity. In the light of the essential translatability of the Christian faith, he examines the effect that cultural diffusion has had on the survival and expansion of Christianity throughout its history. This article will help our readers to reflect more perceptively on the possible responses to fundamental issues raised by our own and differing contexts today.*  
(Editor)

From Pentecost to the twentieth century, Christian history may be divided into six phases. Each phase represents its embodiment in a major culture area which has meant that in that phase it has taken an impress from that culture. In each phase the expression of the Christian faith has developed features which could only have originated in that culture whose impress it has taken within that phase.

## JEWISH—THE FIRST AGE

For one brief, but vital, period, Christianity was entirely Jewish. The Christians of the first generation were all Jews—diverse, perhaps, in background and outlook, Hebraist and Hellenist, conservative and liberal—but without the slightest idea that they had ‘changed their religion’ by recognizing Jesus as Messiah. It remains one of the marvels of the ages that Christianity entered its second phase at all. But those unnamed ‘men of Cyprus and Cyrene’ introduced some Greek speaking pagans in Antioch to the Jewish national saviour, and those law-righteous apostles and elders at Jerusalem agreed that they might enter Israel without becoming Jews. The result was that Christianity became Hellenistic-Roman; the Messiah, Saviour of Israel was recognized to be also the Lord, Saviour of souls. It happened just in time, for soon afterwards the Jewish state disappeared in the early holocausts of AD 70 and AD 135. Only the timeous diffusion of faith in Jesus across cultural lines gave that faith any continuing place in the world. Without its diffusion at that time its principal representatives would have been the Ebionites and similar groups who by the third and fourth centuries lay on the very fringe of the Christian movement, **P. 215** even if they themselves could claim to be the enduring legacy of James the Just and the Jerusalem elders.

In the process of transmission the expression of that faith changed beyond what many an outsider might recognize. To see the extent of the change one has only to look at the utterances of early Jewish Christians as reflected in the New Testament, the utterances which indicate their priorities, the matters most on their hearts. ‘We had hoped that he would be the one to set Israel free’, says the disillusioned disciple on the way to Emmaus ([Luke 24:21](#), TEV). On the mount of ascension, the preoccupation is the same. Realizing that they stand at the threshold of a new era, the disciples ask, ‘Lord will you at this time give the Kingdom back to Israel?’ ([Acts 1:6](#)). Statements and questions like these could be uttered only by Jews, out of centuries of present suffering and hope deferred. They can have no meaning for those who belong to the nations, whether in the first or the twentieth century. These come to Jesus with quite different priorities, and those priorities shape the questions they ask, even about salvation. A first century Levantine Gentile would never have brought to Jesus as a matter of urgency the question of the political destiny of Israel; though he might have raised that of the destiny of the soul. The fact remains that Jesus

Christ fulfilled the different statements, and answered the different questions; or rather, he convinced his Jewish and his Gentile followers, as he convinces his followers today, that the answer to their deepest questions lay with him, even when the question and the answer did not seem to fit. No doubt the words of Cleophas on the Emmaus road, or of the disciples on the mountain, betray an inadequate understanding of his person and work. Nevertheless, he does not reject that understanding as altogether misplaced. He does not say, 'I am not in the business of giving the Kingdom back to Israel, you should keep out of politics and concentrate on inner spiritual realities.' He accepts the statement and the question in the terms in which they are posed—terms which centuries of peculiar experience had conditioned Jews to frame. But—'it is not for you to know when' ([Acts 1:7](#)). There is no reason to think that Gentile statements about the ultimate will be any more final, or Gentile questions about it any more penetrating, than Jewish ones. There is no reason to suppose that Christ's answer to our own fundamental statements and questions, conditioned by quite different experiences, will be any less oblique than those he gave to Cleophas or the disciples. We know only that the full answer must ultimately be no less satisfying.

Those Christian Jews in Antioch who realized that Jesus had [p. 216](#) something to say to their pagan friends took an immense risk. They were prepared to drop the time-honoured word Messiah, knowing that it would mean little to their neighbours, and perhaps mislead them—what concern was the redeemer of Israel, should they grasp the concept, to them? They were prepared to see the title of their national saviour, the fulfilment of the dearest hopes of their people, become attached to the name of Jesus as though it was a sort of surname. They took up the ambiguous and easily misunderstood word 'Lord' ([Acts 11:20](#); contrast, e.g. [Acts 9:22](#), which relates to a Jewish audience). They could not possibly have foreseen where their action would lead; and it would be surprising if someone did not warn them about the disturbing possibilities of confusion and syncretism. But their cross-cultural communication saved Christian faith for the world.

## HELLENISTIC-ROMAN—THE SECOND AGE

The second of the six phases of Christianity was Hellenistic-Roman. This is not, of course, to say that within that age Christianity was geographically confined to the area where Hellenistic-Roman culture was dominant. Important Christian communities lay, for instance, in Central Asia, and East Africa, and South India. But the dominant expression of the Christian faith for several centuries resulted from its steady penetration of Hellenistic thought and culture during a period when that culture was also associated with a single political entity, the Roman Empire.

The second phase has, like the first, left its mark on all later Christianity. Of the new religious ideas which entered with the Christian penetration of Hellenistic culture, one of the most permeative for the future was that of orthodoxy, of a canon of right belief, capable of being stated in a series of propositions arrived at by a process of logical argument. Such a feature was not likely to mark Christianity in its Jewish period; Jewish identity has always been concerned either with what a person *is* or with what he *does* rather than with what he believes. But when Christian faith began to penetrate the Hellenistic Roman world, it encountered a total system of thought, a system to which it was in some respects antipathetic, but which, once encountered, had to be permeated. The system had a certain inbuilt arrogance, a feature it has never quite lost despite the mutations through which the Hellenistic-Roman legacy has gone in its transmission over the centuries to other peoples, and despite the penetration effected by Christian faith.



Basically it maintained that there is one desirable pattern of life, a single 'civilization' in effect, one model of [p. 217](#) society, one body of law, one universe of ideas. Accordingly, there are in essence two types of humanity: people who share that pattern and those ideas, and people who do not. There are Greeks—a cultural, not an ethnic, term—and there are barbarians. There are civilized people who share a common heritage, and there are savages who do not.

In many ways the Jews and their religion already represented a challenge to this assumption. Whatever degree of assimilation to it many Jews might reflect, the stubborn fact of Jewish identity put them in a different category from almost all the rest of the Hellenistic-Roman universe. Alone in that universe they had an alternative literature, a written tradition, of comparable antiquity. And they had their own dual classification of mankind: Israel, *the* nation, and the nations. Hellenistic-Roman Christians had no option but to maintain, and to seek to reconcile, aspects of both their inheritances.

The total system of thought had to be penetrated by the Gospel, Christianized. This meant the endeavour to bring the intellectual tradition into captivity to Christ and using it for new purposes, and it also meant putting the traditions of codification and of organization to the service of the Gospel. The result was orthodoxy; logically expounded belief set in codified form, established through a process of consultation and maintained through effective organization. Hellenistic-Roman civilization offered a total system of thought, and expected general conformity to its norms. The Christian penetration of the system inevitably left it a total system.

## **BARBARIAN—THE THIRD AGE**

Hellenistic-Roman civilization lived for centuries in the shadow of fear; fear of the day when the centre could not hold, when things fell apart, when the over-extended frontiers collapsed and the barbarian hordes poured in. Christians fully shared these fears. Tertullian, who lived in the age of persecution, though he would not countenance Christians in the army—Christ has unbelted every soldier, he says—prayed for the preservation of the Empire; for when the frontiers collapsed, the Great Tribulation would begin. For the people living under the Christian Empire the triumph of the barbarians would be equated with the end of Christian civilization.

Two great events brought about the end of Hellenistic-Roman Christianity. One had been widely predicted—the collapse of the Western Roman Empire before the barbarians. The other no one could have predicted—the emergence of the Arabs as a world power and their occupation of the Eastern provinces where the oldest and [p. 218](#) strongest Christian churches lay. The combination of these forces led to the end of the Hellenistic-Roman phase of Christianity. That it did not lead to the slow strangulation of the total Christian presence in the world was due to the slow, painful and far from satisfactory spread of Christian allegiance among the tribal peoples beyond the old frontiers, the people known as barbarians, the destroyers of Christian civilization. What in fact happened was the development of a third phase of Christianity, what we may call a barbarian phase. Once again, it was only just in time: centuries of erosion and attrition faced the peoples of Christianity's Hellenistic heartlands. Once again, Christianity had been saved by its cross-cultural diffusion.

The culture gap to be bridged was quite as great as that between Jew and Greek, yet the former faith of classical civilization became the religion of peasant cultivators. The process was marked by the more or less ready acceptance by the new Christians of a great deal of the cultural inheritance of the classical civilization from which they derived their Christianity. Further, when they substituted the God of the Bible for their traditional

pantheons, the language and ideas had passed through a Greek-Roman filter before it reached them. The significance of this we must consider later.

Nevertheless, the barbarian phase was emphatically not a simple extension of the Christianity of the patristic age, but a new creation, conditioned less by city-based literary, intellectual and technological tradition than by the circumstances of peasant cultivators and their harsh, uncertain lives. If they took their ideas from the Hellenistic Christian world, they took their attitudes from the primal world; and both ideas and attitudes are components in the complex which makes up a people's religion. As with their predecessors, they appropriated the Christian faith for themselves, and reformulated it with effects which continued amid their successes after their own phase had passed away. If the second phase of Christianity invented the idea of *orthodoxy*, the third invented the idea of the *Christian nation*. Christian Roman Emperors might establish the Church, might punish heretics, might make laws claiming allegiance to Christ, might claim to represent Christ, but tribal peoples knew a far stronger law than any Emperor could enforce, that of custom. Custom is binding upon every child born into a primal community; and non-conformity to that custom is simply unthinkable. A communal decision to adopt the Christian faith might take some time in coming; there might be uncertainty, division, debate for a while but once thoroughly made, the decision would bind everyone in that society. A community must have a single custom. It was not necessarily a case of strong rulers [p. 219](#) enforcing their own choice. In Iceland, which was a democracy with no central ruler, the Assembly was divided down the middle between Christians and non-Christians. When the decision for Christianity was eventually made, the non-Christians felt bitter and betrayed, but no one suggested a division into communities with different religions. Religion in fact is but one aspect of the custom which binds a society together. There can be only one Church in a community. And so barbarian Christianity brings to fruition the idea of the Christian nation.

Once the idea of the Christian nation was established, a new hermeneutic habit easily developed; the parallel between the Christian nation and Israel. Once nation and church are coterminous in scope, the experiences of the nation can be interpreted in terms of the history of Israel. In Western Christianity this habit has long outlived the historical circumstances which gave it birth and has continued into the age of pluralism and secularization.

## WESTERN EUROPE—THE FOURTH AGE

The fourth cultural phase of Christianity was a natural development of the third. Interaction between Christian faith and practice in its Hellenistic-Roman form and the culture of the northern peoples produced a remarkably coherent system across Western and Central Europe. When the Eastern Roman Empire, which effectively prolonged the Hellenistic phase of Christianity for several centuries in one area of the world, finally collapsed before the Muslims, this new hybrid Western form of Christianity became the dominant representation of Christianity. In the sixteenth century this Western formulation was to undergo radical revision through the movements of Reformation. The Protestant version of this was particularly radical (not least through its emphasis on vernacular Scriptures), in stressing the local encounter of man with the Word of God. Reforming Catholicism, on the other hand, stressed the universal nature of the Church, but unconsciously established its universality on the basis of features which belonged essentially to Western intellectual and social history and indeed, largely to a particular period of it. Both forms, however, belonged unmistakably to Western Europe; their very

differences marked a growing cultural divergence between the north and the south of the area.

One major development that took place within the West over those centuries set a challenge to Christian faith as hitherto received in Europe and required its reformulation. As we have seen, a necessary feature of barbarian Christianity was communal decision and mass [p. 220](#) response. But Western thought developed a particular consciousness of the *individual* as a monad, independent of kin-related identity. Christianity in its Western form adapted to this developing consciousness, until the concept of Christian faith as a matter of individual decision and individual application became one of the hallmarks of Western Christianity.

## **EXPANDING EUROPE AND CHRISTIAN RECESSION—THE FIFTH STAGE**

This Western phase of Christianity developed into another phase, with which it should probably be taken: the age of expanding Europe. The population of Europe was exported to other continents and the dominance of Europe extended, until by the twentieth century people of European origin occupied, possessed or dominated the greater part of the globe. During this vital period, Christianity was the professed, and to a considerable extent the active religion of almost all the European peoples.

Seen in the context of Christian history as a whole, this period saw two remarkable developments. One was a substantial *recession* from the Christian faith among the European peoples. Its significance was not at first manifest, because it was not regular and steady. Beginning in the sixteenth century, it had reached notable proportions by the eighteenth, when it appeared as if Christianity might still claim the masses of Europe but was losing the intellectuals. In the eighteenth century however, and for much of the nineteenth, there was a Christian counter-attack, which halted the movement of recession in Europe and brought spectacular accessions in the new towns of North America. The sudden quickening of the recession, therefore, in the twentieth century took observers by surprise—though predictions of its extent had been current a couple of centuries earlier. Only in the twentieth century did it become clear that the great towns which were the source and the sign of Europe's dominance, had never really been evangelized at all.

The other major development of the period was the *cross-cultural transplantation* of Christianity, with varying degrees of success, to multitudes of people outside Europe. It did not look overwhelming by 1920; the high hopes once entertained of the evangelization of the world in one generation had by that time drained away into the trenches of the First World War. But we can see now that it was enough. The seeds of Christian faith had been planted in the Southern continents; before long they could be seen to be fruiting abundantly. All the world Empires, except the Russian, have now passed away; the [p. 221](#) European hegemony of the world is broken; the recession of Christianity among the European peoples appears to be continuing. And yet we seem to stand at the threshold of a new age of Christianity, one in which its main base will be in the Southern continents, and where its dominant expression will be filtered through the culture of those continents. Once again, Christianity has been saved for the world by its diffusion across cultural lines.

## **CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSMISSION—THE SIXTH AGE**

Let us pause here to consider the peculiar history of Christianity, as compared with other faiths. Hindus say with some justice that they represent the world's earliest faith, for many things in Indian religion are the same now as they were before Israel came out of Egypt.

Yet over all those centuries, the geographical and cultural centre has been the same. Invaders like the Aryans have come and made their mark; great innovative movements like that of the Buddha have come, and flourished awhile, and then passed on elsewhere. The Christians and the Muslims with their claims to universal allegiance have come and made their converts. But still the same faith remains in the same place, absorbing all sorts of influences from without, not being itself absorbed by any.

By contrast, Iranian religion has been vital enough to have a moulding effect at certain crucial times on Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam in succession; and yet as a separate, identifiable phenomenon in the world, its presence today is tiny. Christianity, on the other hand, has throughout its history spread outwards, across cultural frontiers, so that each new point on the Christian circumference is a new potential Christian centre. And the very survival of Christianity as a separate faith has evidently been linked to the process of cross-cultural transmission. Indeed, with hindsight, we can see that on several occasions this transmission took place only just in time; that without it, the Christian faith must surely have withered away. Nor has it progress been steadily outwards, as Muslims may claim of their faith. Its progress has been serial, with a principal presence in different parts of the world at different times.

Each phase of Christian history has seen a transformation of Christianity as it has entered and penetrated another culture. There is no such thing as 'Christian culture' or 'Christian civilization' in the sense that there is an Islamic culture, and an Islamic civilization. There have been several different Christian civilizations already; there may yet be many more. The reason for this lies in the infinite translatability [p. 222](#) of the Christian faith. Islam, the only other faith hitherto to make a comparable impact in such global terms, can produce a simple recognizable culture (recognizable despite local assimilations and variations) across its huge geographical spread. This has surely something to do with the ultimate untranslatability of its charter document, the Qur'an. The Christian Scriptures, by contrast, are open to translation; nay, the great Act on which Christian faith rests, the Word becoming flesh and pitching tent among us, is itself an act of translation. And this principle brings Christ to the heart of each culture where he finds acceptance; to the burning questions within that culture, to the points of reference within it by which men know themselves. That is why each phase of Christian history has produced new themes: themes which the points of reference of that culture have made inescapable for those who share that framework. The same themes may lie beyond the conception of Christians of an earlier or another framework of thought. They will have their own commanding heights to be conquered by Christ.

### **Diversity and Coherence in Historic Christianity**

If we were to take samples of *representative* Christians from every century from the first to the twentieth, moving from place to place as will be necessary if our choice is to be representative, would they have anything in common? Certainly such a collection of people would often have quite different priorities in the expression of the faith. And it is not only that the priorities are different; what appears of utmost importance to one group may appear intolerable, even blasphemous, to another. Even were we to take only those acknowledged as forming the tradition of Christianity represented by Western Evangelicals—how does the expression of the faith compare among Temple-worshipping Jew, Greek Council Father, Celtic monk, German Reformer, English Puritan, Victorian Churchman? How defective would each think the other on matters vital to religion?

And yet I believe we can discern a firm coherence underlying all these, and indeed, the whole of historic Christianity. It is not easy to state this coherence in propositional, still less in credal form—for extended credal formulation is itself a necessary product of a

particular Christian culture. But there is a small body of convictions and responses which express themselves when Christians of any culture express their faith. These may perhaps be stated thus:

(1) The worship of the God of Israel. This not only defines the nature of God; the One, the Creator and the Judge, the One who does right and before whom man falls down; it marks the historical p. 223 particularity of Christian faith. And it links the Christian—usually a Gentile—with the history of a people quite different from his own. It gives him a point of reference outside himself and his society.

(2) The ultimate significance of Jesus of Nazareth. This is perhaps the test which above all marks off historic Christianity from the various movements along its fringes, as well as from other world faiths which accord recognition to the Christ. Once again, it would be pointless to try to encapsulate this ultimacy for ever in any one credal formula. Any such formula will be superseded; or, even if adopted for traditional reasons, it may make no impression on believers who do not have the conceptual vocabulary the formula will imply. Each culture has its ultimate; and Christ is the ultimate in everyone's vocabulary.

(3) That God is active where believers are.

(4) That believers constitute a people of God transcending time and space.

These convictions appear to underlie the whole Christian tradition across the centuries, in all its diversity. Some of the very diversity of Christ in expression, indeed, has itself arisen from the pressure of the need to set forth these responses in terms of the believers' framework of thought and perception of the world. To them we should perhaps add a small body of institutions which have continued from century to century. The most obvious of these have been the reading of a common body of scriptures and the special use of bread and wine and water.

### **Southern cultures and the Christian future**

Once more the Christian faith is penetrating new cultures—those of Africa and the Pacific and parts of Asia. (The Latin American situation is too complex for us to pause to consider its peculiar significance here.) The present indications are that these southern expressions of Christianity are becoming the dominant forms of the faith.

This is likely to mean the appearance of new themes and priorities undreamt of by ourselves or by earlier Christian ages; for it is the mark of Christian faith that it must bring Christ to the big issues which are closest to men's hearts; and it does so through the structures by which people perceive and recognize their world; and these are not the same for all men. It must not be assumed that themes which have been primary in the Christian penetration of former cultures will remain primary for all the new ones. They may not possess those points of reference which made orthodoxy, for instance, or the Christian nation, or the primacy of individual decision absolutely crucial to the capture by Christ of other world views. Pious early Jewish Christians would p. 224 have found their Greek successors strangely cold about Israel's most precious possession, the Law of God and its guide to living. Many of them would have been equally disturbed by the intellectual complexities into which christological discussion was leading Greek Christians. In each case what was happening was the working out of Christian faith within accepted views of the world, so that those world views—as with the conversion of believers—are transformed, yet recognizable.

As the process continues in the Southern continents, Christians whose tradition has been shaped by other factors will still be able to look out for the signposts of historic Christianity so far: the worship of the God of Israel, the recognition of the ultimate significance of Christ, the knowledge that God is active among the believers, the



acknowledgement of a people of God transcending time and space; and join in the common reading of the Scriptures, and in the special use of bread and wine and water.

For in this survey I have left on one side a vital theme. I have talked of the transmission of Christianity across cultural frontiers and the way that this has produced a series of Christian transformations across the centuries. These transformations may be seen as the result of the great principle of translatability which lies at the heart of Christian faith and is demonstrated both in the Incarnation and in the Scriptures. It might be valuable to link this process with Paul's vision in [Ephesians 4](#) of the full-grown man unto which we are to grow together—as though the very diversity of Christian humanity makes it complete. The image is hard for us to appropriate because of the very individualism so crucial a part of our own world view. But it looks as though Paul was less impressed by the passing of faith to the Gentiles—mightily as he rejoiced in it, still less by the new shape which Christian faith took in Gentile hands—much as he himself may have been responsible for this, than by the fact that through Christ one nation had been made out of two. Jew and Gentile, who had not in centuries been able to eat in each others' houses without calling the whole covenant of God into question, now sat down together at the table of the Lord. It was a phase of Christian history that did not last long. Not long after Paul's time, Gentiles so dominated the Christian church that in most areas Jews were hardly noticeable in it. Christianity became a Gentile matter, just as in its earliest days it had been a Jewish matter. But, for a few brief years, the one-made-out-of-two was visibly demonstrated, the middle wall of partition was down, the irreconcilables were reconciled. This was, surely, not simply a historical episode, but a paradigmatic one, to be repeated, even if briefly, again and again. It is repeated as people [p. 225](#) separated by language, history and culture recognize each other in Christ. And the recognition is not based on one adopting the ways of thought and behaviour and expression, however sanctified, of the other; that is Judaizing, and another Gospel. Christ must rule in the minds of his people; which means extending his dominion over those corporate structures of thought that constitute a culture. The very act of doing so must sharpen the identity of those who share a culture. The faith of Christ is infinitely translatable, it creates 'a place to feel at home'. But it must not make a place where we are so much at home that no one also can live there. Here we have no abiding city. In Christ all poor sinners meet, and in finding themselves reconciled with him, are reconciled to each other.

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Some aspects of this topic are explored further in 'The Gospel as the Prisoner and the Liberator of Culture', *Faith and Thought* 108 (1-2) 1981, 39-52 (reprinted in *Missionalia* 10 (3) 1982, 93-105 and *Evangelical Review of Theology* 7 (2) 1983, 219-233) and in 'The History of Christian Expansion reconsidered', in Monica Hill (ed.) *How Churches Grow* (London: MARC Europe 1984, 34-43). I have tried to deduce from the historical deposit the nature of 'historic Christianity' as a whole in the section 'Christianity' in J. R. Hinnells (ed.), *A Handbook of Living Religions*, Harmondsworth: Viking-Penguin 1984, 56-122. [p. 226](#)

# North American Protestant Theology: Impact on Central America

James C. Dekker

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*This well researched article shows how fragmented Protestant churches have often become prey to the manipulation of political powers in Latin America in spite of their profession of the separation of Church and State. The author discusses the extent to which the avowed theologies of North American missions have become the theologies of Latin Americans. He appeals for a conscientious biblical political education to help evangelicals dissolve their blind spots.*

(Editor)

Probably not even Carl F. H. Henry can define 'North American Protestant Theology,' much less articulate its impact on another culture. We are forced to make inferences drawn from sources that deal with other themes. In researching this topic I asked Dr. Wilton Nelson, Professor Emeritus of Church History at the Latin American Biblical Seminary in San José, Costa Rica, for bibliographical suggestions. Nelson wrote back:

... it seems a bit strange if you are referring to Protestant theology in Central America, since theology in this part of the world has been formed almost entirely by American missionaries.... It can hardly be said that there was a *criolla* theology affected by theology from the USA.<sup>1</sup>

So in a sense we have our answer early. The impact of North American protestant theologies is total.<sup>2</sup>

That helps us little. Still it does suggest questions this paper will treat: Against what background did Protestant missions come to Central America? Who came? What theologies have they taught?

The bibliography to investigate the question I posed to Wilton Nelson is almost nonexistent. Orlando Costas' pioneering *Theology of p. 227 the Crossroads*<sup>3</sup> treats all Latin America and is not primarily an historical study. Nelson himself has written a brief, informative book, *El Protestantismo en Centro America*.<sup>4</sup> Clifton Holland is finishing a doctoral dissertation on 'The History of the Protestant Movement in Central America.' None deals extensively, however, with the impact of the theologies in Central America.

Sources that could help answer our questions exist, but in out-of-the-way places: small mission archives; promotional literature of various missions; journals of deceased

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Nelson to author, August 19, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Of course we cannot ignore the important work that Latin American theologians are doing currently. The Latin American Theological Fraternity (LATF), for example, provides a focus for creative theological and biblical work. The LATF is a recent development, however. Its concerns often focus on many of the problems of Latin American Protestantism to be discussed here.

<sup>3</sup> *Theology of the Crossroads: Missiology in Mainline Protestantism, 1969-1974* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> (Miami: Editorial Caribe, 1982; Eng. Trans. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).



missionaries that appeared in mimeographed form, if at all. Research and travel costs preclude access to such information. Without these tools, we are left with second best. Immediately we see the need for scholarship in this area. Based on the preliminary research I have done, I offer tentative responses to the three questions I posed.

## **AGAINST WHAT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND DID PROTESTANT MISSIONS COME TO CENTRAL AMERICA?**

J. Lloyd Meacham's classic *Church and State in Latin America*<sup>5</sup> sketches the situation that formed the backdrop for Protestant missions entering Central America. Of Latin America in general Meacham writes:

The bitter, devastating, politico-ecclesiastic conflicts were the result ... of attempts to enforce unwise policies, pro- and anti-clerical. The extremists among the clericals and anti-religionists alternated in control of the governments and ... insisted on forcing their remedies down the throats of their adversaries. There was no compromise on religious policy. The inevitable result was revolution and counterrevolution, repressive measures and retaliatory measures.<sup>6</sup>

Independence from Spain gave birth to the fledgling Central American Federation in 1821. In the area, political and ecclesiastical affairs were so thoroughly intertwined as to be at times indistinguishable. Thus the break from Spain would long rumble like earthquake aftershocks through the ecclesiastical landscape. Why was this so? To answer that, we will briefly look at the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in the colonial era. p. 228

It is now a cliché that the RCC was the handmaiden of the Portuguese and Spanish states during colonization. Several popes ceded to Portuguese and Spanish monarchs the right of naming all church officials and collecting tithes. James E. Wood, Jr., refers to the 'almost total absorption of the Roman Catholic Church by the crown.' Throughout colonization, then,

perhaps inevitably the Church became increasingly identified with the power and prestige of Spanish rule.... As a Spanish church, rather than an indigenous church, the *sympathies of the hierarchy* [italics mine] were clearly with Spain and not with the emerging new nations.<sup>7</sup>

Wood's generalizations hold true for Central America also.

The hierarchy sided with Spain while independence was brewing in the New World. Nelson points to the division between higher and lower clergy. He recalls that thirteen of the twenty-nine signatories to the Central American Declaration of Independence were priests.<sup>8</sup> Wood agrees. Taken as a whole, the clergy

was bitterly divided in their sympathies and support. To be sure, the sympathies of the hierarchy and the higher clergy—almost all of whom were Spanish born—were on the side of the crown, but the sympathies of the lower clergy—the vast majority of whom were native Americans of Indian and Negro parentage—were on the side of political

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<sup>5</sup> *Church and State in Latin America: A History of Politico-Ecclesiastical Relations* (rev. ed.; Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1966).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>7</sup> James E. Wood, Jr., 'Editorial,' *A Journal of Church and State*, Spring, 1966, pp. 174, 178–79.

<sup>8</sup> Nelson, 27.

independence from Spain. Members of the lower clergy even actively participated in the independence movement.<sup>9</sup>

We begin to see the complex background that Protestantism was soon to enter. As a political entity, the RCC had left a mark identical to that of imperialist Spain. Thus *institutionally* it became the whipping boy of Latin America's patriots. To support the hierarchy's policies was to favor Spain and oppose independence. This is not, however, the whole story. Through want of alternatives, the RCC had become thoroughly ingrained into Latin American life as a *religious* force. The clergy who supported independence did not turn anti-Catholic. They remained faithful to Catholic teachings, as did most of the political patriots of Latin America. With independence, a dynamic political and religious situation was brewing, but anticlericalism by no means brought anti-Catholicism.

Anticlericalism continued influential after Central American independence. p. 229 Wood points out that after independence the RCC still reaped what it long had sown. Attempting now to break the political back of the RCC, 'the new state rulers maintained that they had inherited the right of patronage with sovereignty.'<sup>10</sup> Papal protests that patronage was a privilege and not a right were in vain. '*Patronato nacional* was substituted for royal patronage throughout most of Latin America.'<sup>11</sup>

As an institution the RCC was down but not out. For several decades the pendulum swung between the liberal anticlericals and the hierarchy allied with pro-Vatican *criollo* patriots. Even during this restive period Roman Catholicism remained the only authorized religion.<sup>12</sup> The RCC regained lost ground in Guatemala during General Rafael Carrera's dictatorship from 1839 to 1865. After some laws enacted during Mariano Galvez' ineffectual rule were repealed, Catholicism was reinstituted as the sole religion of the country in 1852.<sup>13</sup> When Miguel García Granados toppled Vicente Cerna in 1870, however, the RCC suffered a blow from which it has institutionally never recovered. In June 1873 freedom of religion was decreed; the concordat of 1852 became invalid.<sup>14</sup>

In Costa Rica the RCC was faring better than in Guatemala. Until 1848 expulsion was guaranteed any foreigner who propagated any faith other than Catholicism. In 1869 other 'sects' were officially tolerated. But the RCC was still the state religion and received some subsidy.<sup>15</sup> The examples of Guatemala and Costa Rica show that, slowly, religious toleration was both legislated and actual. Into this abidingly restive situation came the first Protestants. Most were immigrants; some daring few came later as missionaries.

## WHO WERE THE FIRST PROTESTANTS?

Wilton Nelson gives a curious introduction to Protestantism in Central America. Instead of starting in the nineteenth century, he goes back to the English pirates who gutted Spanish imperial shipping. While these men were often rogues, they were nevertheless

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<sup>9</sup> Wood, 26–27.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Mecham, 310, 311; see Nelson, 26–32, for some changes occurring in Central America.

<sup>13</sup> Mecham, 316.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Richard L. Millett, 'Protestant-Catholic Relations in Costa Rica,' *A Journal of Church and State*, XII (Winter 1970), 41–42.

both English and P. 230 Protestant. Nelson quotes Anglican priest Stephen Caiger and comments:

'The pirates considered their plunder of the Spanish galleons a *holy war* [italics mine] against Spanish greed and the cruelty of the Inquisition.' Every ship carried a Bible on which the pirates would place their hands to swear faithfulness to the 'brotherhood.'<sup>16</sup>

If the pirates were fighting a 'holy war,' the RCC was defending its turf with surpassing vigor. It established the Inquisition in the New World, whose zeal Nelson explains:

The motive for establishing the Inquisition was precisely the RCC's fear that Protestantism would make inroads into the Americas. As Guatemalan expert Ernesto Cinchilla Aguilar says: 'Persecution of Protestants constitutes one of the fundamental attitudes of the Holy See in the Americas.'<sup>17</sup>

Early on, the stage was set for mutually hostile attitudes and actions that soon characterized Protestantism's battle with Catholicism in the Americas.

No one claims that the English pirates' oaths fulfilled the Great Commission in any way. Even the first Protestants came to Central America as immigrants and not as missionaries.<sup>18</sup> Again, conservative Costa Rica held off longer than the other areas. According to Millett:

Until the last decade of the nineteenth century, Protestantism in Costa Rica was generally confined to non-Catholic immigrants, notably English Anglicans in San José and Jamaican Baptists and Methodists in the coastal area around Limón.<sup>19</sup>

From the outset, however, a political motive helped encourage the spread of Anglicanism. The Episcopalian church located today in downtown San José, Costa Rica, was one of many founded in concert with an outspoken British foreign policy goal. Nelson writes:

At that time [1860] the British Empire was rapidly developing its reach and surely the government of her Majesty [Queen Victoria] sponsored the construction of similar chapels as a part of its expansionist policy.<sup>20</sup>

While cross and sword were impossible to separate in the Spanish Empire, cross and trowel looked pretty much alike to imperial Britain.

Guatemala's and the other countries' introduction to Protestantism p. 231 came earlier through Protestantism's real vanguard throughout Latin America, namely the Bible societies. Their history is told elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> These were the first organizations to approach Latin America with the evangelistic fervor that has since characterized Protestantism.<sup>22</sup>

By nature nondenominational, the Bible societies did an indispensable service for the spread of the Gospel. Their courageous colporteurs in many cases placed Bibles in the

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<sup>16</sup> Nelson, 16, author's translation.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19, author's translation.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–29.

<sup>19</sup> Millett, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Nelson, 33, author's translation.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Otis Dwight, *The Centennial History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1916). This is dated, but it includes good sources.

<sup>22</sup> Nelson, 45.

hands of national priests who had never seen the book before. One representative, D. H. Wheeler, worked in Nicaragua. When he refused to fight against William Walker's ruffians, he was executed.<sup>23</sup>

More than one worker took Bible distribution a step further and helped organize educational systems. In Guatemala the former dissolute British sailor Frederick Crowe came to the Lord and quickly turned his energies to spreading his newfound message of salvation. From 1846 to 1849, during the term of pro-Vatican Rafael Carrera, Crowe faced much opposition. Still he ran a school which the eventual statesman and poet Lorenzo Montúfar attended.<sup>24</sup> Crowe suffered for his faithfulness. He was booted from Guatemala when the archbishop accused him of distributing illegal literature—and of being an Anglican priest, though he was a Baptist layman.

Meanwhile, Guatemala's political ferment led to one crisis after another. The Liberal Revolution of 1871 placed Miguel García Granados in the Presidency. His comrade-in-arms, Justo Rufino Barrios, took his place in 1873. As happened during the convulsive decade of independence, so now Guatemala's Liberals were anticlerical but not necessarily anti-Catholic. In hewing partially to the ideas of the French Revolution and Comtian Positivism,<sup>25</sup> Barrios saw the RCC's continuing political power and Carrera's Catholic reestablishment as a major barrier. He wished to free Guatemala from its isolation within the Iberian world. The new constitution's religious toleration permitted the government to move against the RCC once again and pave the way for official Protestant entrance.

Such was the situation that the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missionaries faced when it placed the first Protestant missionary in [p. 232](#) Guatemala. Mrs. Cleaves, a Presbyterian, owned a ranch in Chimaltenango. She convinced her friend Barrios that he could start a new era by introducing Presbyterianism. Barrios instructed Lorenzo Montúfar, then in the United States, to make the necessary arrangements.<sup>26</sup> Barrios travelled to the United States and returned with John C. Hill, the Presbyterian missionary whose passage the Guatemalan government paid.<sup>27</sup> Barrios charged Hill nominal rent for the house that served as the school where he also sent his children for a time.<sup>28</sup> Troubled by financial problems, Hill left Guatemala in 1885 after Barrios died in battle.

Other desultory attempts to send missionaries to Guatemala continued for a few years.<sup>29</sup> The Presbyterians soon replaced Hill. Edward Haymaker arrived in Guatemala in 1887 and stayed there, with only one prolonged absence, even after his retirement. Throughout his nearly sixty-year career, Haymaker founded schools and churches all over the country. They developed into the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church of

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 48; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, V (New York and London: Harper, 1943), 115–16.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson, 46–47.

<sup>25</sup> Hubert J. Miller, 'Positivism and Educational Reforms in Guatemala, 1871–1885,' *A Journal of Church and State*, VIII (Spring 1966), 251ff.

<sup>26</sup> Nelson, 49–50.

<sup>27</sup> Latourette, 115–16.

<sup>28</sup> Nelson, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Wilkins B. Winn, 'Albert Edward Bishop and the Establishment of the Central American Mission in Guatemala, 1899–1922,' *Militarists, Merchants and Missionaries* (University, Alabama: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1970), 93.

Guatemala. Today the church numbers some 16,000 communicant members in nine presbyteries and four distinct cultural groups.

We detailed the beginnings and current results of Presbyterian missions in Guatemala because they are representative of the mainline denominational work that was carried on in Central America. Briefly, Methodist, Baptist (especially Southern) and Presbyterians were the *denominations* that led the way in Central America. All these groups organized churches with close ties to the parent organizations, largely from the United States.<sup>30</sup> Thus despite the transplant of North American denominationalism, none of those groups viewed itself as the *only* representative of the true Gospel. Rather, they were united—sometimes loosely, sometimes closely—in common effort to bring ecclesiastical Protestantism to Central America.

But denominational missions were not the only groups representing Protestantism. We have mentioned the Bible societies. Akin to them in their general lack of ecclesiology are the faith missions that Latourette p. 233 says prevailed more in Latin America than in other places.<sup>31</sup> We will not list all such missions, but they share characteristics. They are not associated with just one denominational agency; the missionaries they sponsor must raise their own support. Examples of these are the Latin America Mission (LAM) and the United World Mission (UWM)—to pick two arbitrarily. LAM has organized extensive ministries through much of Latin America. In the early 1970s it became an equal partner with many ministries that had been the mission's children or grandchildren.

UWM carries on ministries in Guatemala, Cuba and Venezuela most notably. Both LAM and UWM, while not denominational agencies in the United States, organized denominations overseas. Ecclesiology was not the strong suit of faith missions in their inception. Still, once on the field, missionaries saw the need for ecclesiastical organization.

The well-known independent Central American Mission (CAM) also formed a denomination through the isthmus. The CAM was established in Dallas, Texas, in 1890. Its primary aim 'was the spread of Bible teachings throughout Middle America.'<sup>32</sup> Organized by Dr. C. I. Scofield, the CAM's zeal stems in part from its dispensationalist teaching that these are the last hours of the last days. Now more than ever before, Christ's second coming is imminent. Such urgency placed thirty-three missionaries in all five Central American countries by 1902.<sup>33</sup>

The flood of Protestant missionaries, mostly from the United States, has not abated. We must not forget the work of Moravian and Methodist missionaries from Europe on Nicaragua's and Costa Rica's coasts. Still, in general, only when missionaries from the United States arrived did real Protestant penetration into Hispanic and indigenous Central America begin.

After 1900 Pentecostal mission work began. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) was the pioneer in Guatemala. Charles Furnam split with his Free Methodist sponsors to work with the Church of God.<sup>34</sup> Presently, Pentecostal missions are almost too numerous to catalog throughout Central America. Some are denominational; many come from individual congregations.

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<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age: The Nineteenth Century Outside Europe* (New York: Harper, 1961), 302.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Winn, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Latourette, *Expansion*, VII, 116.

<sup>34</sup> Nelson, 64.

Pentecostal congregations send a few missionaries to Central p. 234 America and organize churches in the villages or cities where they settle. Often their exclusivistic gospel precludes cooperation with other groups, even Pentecostals. Their doctrines require a baptism with the Holy Spirit as manifested by speaking in tongues. Such practices are divisive. More than once, mainline churches have lost many members and congregations to the 'Pentecostal wolves,' as they term their ostensible brothers in the faith. The Northern Presbytery of the Guatemalan Presbyterian Church was decimated in the 1960s by proselytizing Pentecostals. That presbytery saw several churches close; others dropped to a handful of worshippers.

While the Pentecostals brought new vigor to tradition-bound churches, often they took born-again believers into their congregations. Looking at this phenomenon in historical perspective, it is ironic to find established Protestant denominations complaining about johnny-come-lately Pentecostals in the same terms that the RCC excoriated the first Protestants a century ago.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, such specialized Protestant ministries as Wycliffe Bible Translators, World Vision, World Relief, Inc., Church World Service, Mennonite Central Committee and so on have burgeoned in Central America. Of those, Wycliffe has the longest history. It began in Guatemala in 1931 when Cameron Townsend, himself a CAM worker, translated and published the Ca'kchiquel New Testament.<sup>36</sup> Relief and development organizations have been working most intensively in Central America since natural disasters swept three countries in the 1970s. The 1972 Managua earthquake stimulated massive relief and continuing development efforts from many Protestant organizations. Though some organizations have recently curtailed work, many agencies weathered the transition from Somoza to the Sandinistas and continue to work in the new political climate.

Similarly, Hurricane Fifi in Honduras in 1975 brought missions and missionaries there. This also happened in Guatemala following the 1976 earthquake.

The latest MARC *Mission Handbook* lists 253 North American Protestant missions active in Central America.<sup>37</sup> (Since some agencies work in more than one country, not all 253 are different.) As of 1976, 1148 Protestant missionaries were working in those countries; by 1980 there were 12,940. To isolate one country, the PROCADES survey p. 235 tallies 210 different organizations working in Guatemala. Many have only one congregation; others are substantial denominations. PROCADES counts 6448 congregations and mission stations as reported by the various churches. More than 50 of those churches relate to international organizations with headquarters in the United States.<sup>38</sup>

Here we have been as specific as available research permitted. After viewing the history and current statistics, we see that North American Protestants continue to take our Lord's Great Commission seriously. They have gone and baptized with unabated zeal. We will discuss some of the content of the teaching and discipling in the next section.

## **WHAT THEOLOGIES HAVE THEY TAUGHT?**

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<sup>35</sup> Winn, 99.

<sup>36</sup> Nelson, 62.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Wilson, ed., *Mission Handbook: North American Protestant Ministries Overseas* (12th ed.; Monrovia, California: MARC, 1979), 39-45.

<sup>38</sup> PROCADES, *Directorio de Iglesias, Organizaciones y Ministerios del Movimiento Protestante: Guatemala* (San José, Costa Rica: INDEF and SEPAL, 1981), 19-63.



Even though we have not treated the official theologies of the various denominations and missions, some theological themes of the Protestant movement have been limned. Using the backdrop we have sketched and some recent changes in the religious-political situation, we can meaningfully discuss the impact of North American theology.

Protestant zeal has not lessened. Numbers of the missionaries and agencies attest to that. Like Roman Catholics who preceded them by 350 years, Protestants came to Central America to bring light. Theirs, however, was the light of personal Christianity, not that of Christendom. Latourette describes the Catholicism that Protestants encountered as 'anemic' and 'parasitic,' top-heavy with imported priests,<sup>39</sup> shot through with superstition and moral and political corruption.<sup>40</sup> For many missionaries in Central America, Latourette's pre-Vatican II assessment remains contemporary. Few Catholic clergy today will dispute the need to attack superstition. Nevertheless, this initial Protestant attitude of superiority itself characterized their mission theology and practice.

It bespoke an attitude of superiority that soon combined with a beleaguered minority complex. All early Protestant accounts I know often refer to overt opposition from Roman Catholic clergy and congregations. Pioneer CAM pastor Albert E. Bishop wrote of priests who opposed missionaries, in 1905 a Catholic procession on Good Friday wrecked the CAM building in Guatemala City and threatened to destroy the work entirely. U.S. governmental intervention persuaded p. 236 the Guatemalan authorities to pay for the damages.<sup>41</sup> No one should underestimate the depth of anti-Protestant feeling on the part of the RCC, but more significantly on the part of the populace. Wilton Nelson claims:

For Central Americans, Roman Catholicism had come nearly to be what the Hebrew religion was for Jews. This was the case to such an extent that many considered conversion to Protestantism as a betrayal of their race.<sup>42</sup>

The attitude of superiority is easy for North American Protestants to understand. To Central Americans, however, who had recently won political independence from Spain, the Protestants' attitude bore more than religious import. It held both a religious and political threat. They were Central Americans and they were Catholics. To them then, as often today, Protestant missionaries represented a threat not unlike the rogue English pirates mentioned earlier.

Today it is hard to find North American missionaries who do not at least recognize the cultural-religiopolitical barriers they face. Still, because Protestantism has contributed to Central America's culture and spiritual vitality, it is just as difficult to find missionaries who take those problems seriously. Forty years ago, Kenneth Scott Latourette wrote:

Culturally, Latin America and the United States were separated by a vast gulf.... The United States was suspect in Latin America as a potential aggressor, especially after its territorial gains at the expense of Mexico and its policies in Central America and the Caribbean.... That, under these circumstances, the Protestant churches of the United States inaugurated extensive enterprises among the Roman Catholics of Latin America ... was not due to

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<sup>39</sup> Latourette, *Revolutionary Age*, 285.

<sup>40</sup> *Idem*, *Expansion*, V, 109.

<sup>41</sup> Winn, 99, 101.

<sup>42</sup> Nelson, 44, author's translation.



political or imperial commercialism. It came about through the missionary purpose of these churches which regarded the entire human race as their field.<sup>43</sup>

The missionary zeal is admirable. Missionaries did not see themselves as the vanguard of North American interests. Nevertheless, neither did they show much awareness of the charged situation into which they threw themselves. The anti-Protestantism they experienced at the hands of warring Catholics contained more than a hint of anti-Americanism. If in general Central Americans considered Catholicism an integral part of their identity, they surely saw the same mixture of identity in North American Protestant missionaries. When we further p. 237 recall that new-style Central American rulers such as Justo Rufino Barrios actively wooed both Protestant immigrants and missionaries,<sup>44</sup> we see North American Protestants heading into potentially compromising situations like proverbial innocents abroad.

Nevertheless, despite the barriers, Protestantism has grown dramatically. PROCADES research indicates that perhaps 25 percent of Guatemalans now consider themselves Protestants. The astounding growth of the 'wolfish sect,' as the Archbishopric of Guatemala called Protestantism in 1911,<sup>45</sup> emphasizes the accuracy of Orlando Costas' two-pronged observation:

Evangelical Protestantism represents a transplanted historical phenomenon which continues to maintain its link with (and theological dependence on) the Evangelical Movement of the Anglo-Saxon world, predominantly in its North American variant.... This reality, however, does not abrogate the fact that traditional Evangelical characteristics have become *such a fundamental part of the theology of a segment of Latin American Protestants* [italics mine] that it is hard to deny it without also denying its existence.... The theology of Latin American Evangelicalism must be seen in the light of its Anglo-Saxon progenitor and counterpart.<sup>46</sup>

Because Latin American Protestantism from North American roots is now part of the cultural and religious ambience, it is the more imperative to come to grips with its accompanying political implications.

We should be wary of a 'detective view of history' that Xabier Gorostiaga and Costas warn about.<sup>47</sup> At the same time we must realize that Christian missionaries are, consciously or not, 'part of a worldwide system that often uses people, movements and institutions for purposes other than the communication of the Gospel and its liberating power.'<sup>48</sup> In the past, few realized that they were bearing both a religious and a political message. We cannot retrace the thoughts of John C. Hill and his Presbyterian supervisors. Still, the questions burn today: Did they not realize that by accepting privileges from Barrios' government they were falling into a trap not unlike that into which the RCC fell by ceding patronage to Spain and Portugal during colonization? Did not they and mission boards since then draw any connection between their actions and Constantine's legitimization p. 238 of the early Christian Church in the fourth century? Similarly, when

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<sup>43</sup> Latourette, *Expansion*, V, 112.

<sup>44</sup> See Nelson, 49.

<sup>45</sup> Winn, 99.

<sup>46</sup> Costas, *Crossroads*, p.15, note.

<sup>47</sup> Orlando E. Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982), 66.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

Albert E. Bishop and the CAM used the U.S. government so forcefully to win compensation for destroyed property, did they never think of the political message that action carried?

Examples of blind spots abound. The building of the Central Presbyterian Church in Guatemala City is built on a parcel of land earlier donated to it by Guatemala's government. Today the church lies behind the National Palace across the street from the Presidential Guard headquarters and adjacent to the Presidential Residence.

Overt political involvement by Protestants has been taboo until recently; unconscious political yea-saying has been part of their identity for decades. While today they are becoming active in partisan politics, conscious education regarding political issues has never been an integral part of Protestants' lives in Guatemala or Central America. This ignorance was part of the self-imposed taboo on politics. In order to avoid controversy, Protestantism has not carried out political evangelism in Central America.

Unofficially, however, leadership has sought approval of governing authorities or has maintained silence in the face of abuses by civil authorities. During the November 1982 Centennial celebration of Guatemalan Protestantism, thousands of sincere, joyous *evangélicos* crowded Guatemala City. They came from all over the country to celebrate 100 years of Protestantism. Their celebration was marred. Instead of being permitted to celebrate their faith, those thousands were manipulated by Protestant and governmental leaders in the final mass meeting on Guatemala's military parade ground, Campo Mare. Luis Palau's sermon urged them to obey governmental authorities. On the dais with him were Protestant church leaders, members of the Chamber of Commerce and Guatemalan cabinet ministers. Then-President Efraín Ríos Montt spoke last and closed with prayer. These sad facts exemplify some of the negative results of admirable, though naive, missionary zeal. Some sectors of Protestantism no longer fall prey to such naivete or subsequent manipulation.<sup>49</sup>

We can discern in part why this political naivete resulted by looking at another theological given of Protestantism in Central America. Protestants went representing the Reformation. As we saw, the Bible societies made the first approach by bringing the previously unknown Bible. Such a method was crucial, but in fact it represented Reformation principles only partially. *Sola scriptura* was a Reformation byword, but incorporated within that slogan was a powerful doctrine p. 239 of the Church and its universal unity. Although the Reformers left the RCC, they did so reluctantly. By the nineteenth century such reluctance was an anachronism among many Protestants. State churches and denominationalism had turned Europe and the United States into a crazy-quilt of groups with many similar doctrines but virtually no organizational unity. Churches split and formed new denominations for an incredible variety of reasons that Calvin and Luther never dreamed of as legitimate.

An even greater multitude of churches sprouted in Central America. Despite the attempts at unity that we will mention, ecclesiology has never been a long suit of Central American Protestantism, nor of its forebears; with rare exceptions ecclesiology has become a travesty. As pointed out earlier, some sense of need for unity did produce results, both among mainline Protestants and some para-church missions that organized denominations. Latourette points out:

A feature of the advance of Protestantism was the development of cooperation among some of the major Protestant bodies represented in Latin America.... It was given impetus ... by the criticism leveled at Protestants in that area that in contrast with the impressive

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<sup>49</sup> See William Cook's article in the *MQR* for examples.

facade of unity presented by the Roman Catholic Church ... Protestants were patently divided.<sup>50</sup>

Thus Central America saw the birth of various *comities*. These divided a region into sections into which no signatory denomination would intrude. Such an attempt at Protestant ecumenism thrived for a time in Guatemala with the organization of the Evangelical Synod in 1935.<sup>51</sup> But the cooperation was short-lived. The Synod's unity broke down in the face of interdenominational squabbles and the arrival of freewheeling Pentecostals. Apart from some established Pentecostal denominations, independent Pentecostal groups helped dissolve Protestant unity by the proselytizing mentioned earlier.

By not emphasizing Protestant unity as an indispensable mark of the true Church of Jesus Christ, later Protestant missionaries and their missions accepted as a full Gospel something that was missing an integral part. Within established Protestantism we see the potential for fragmentation. The CAM, we recall, hoped to spread Bible teaching; that was part of its identity. Establishing churches was a *means*, but the Church was not, in much Protestant thinking, 'the pillar and ground of the truth' ([1 Timothy 3:15](#)). The CAM did join the Evangelical Synod of Guatemala and is currently a member of the loose Evangelical Alliance [p. 240](#) there, but that Alliance is a far cry from the dream of the Synod's organizers. Similarly, Bible societies distributed Scriptures, but operated with little thought of ecclesiastical organization. In connection with this, Wilton Nelson comments:

This way of thinking provided a strong push to mission work, but at times it resulted in shallow work, in neglect and even lack of appreciation for those aspects of mission and church work that have no direct relationship with evangelism.<sup>52</sup>

Lack of orientation toward ecclesiastical unity profoundly affects the message of salvation a church preaches. With no importance attached to organizational brotherhood, sociological ties among sister and brother in Christ will be correspondingly weak. If a congregation splits over personal differences between two leaders, two congregations result. Both profess the same God, but when one member suffers, contrary to [1 Corinthians 12:14](#) ff., members of other denominations or other congregations do not feel the hurt and hence do not respond as a unit. Pastors, leaders, and layworkers have been kidnapped in Guatemala. Both fear of reprisal by authorities and false accusations that the victims were communists help reinforce a lack of solidarity among members of Christ's body. Protestant churches in Guatemala have not been willing to take up the cause of their suffering members except by way of exception.<sup>53</sup>

Such readiness to avoid problems makes the fragmented Protestant churches easy prey for governments that wish to secure a Protestant seal of approval as Roman Catholic support wanes. Not willing to lose the privileges of freedom of worship granted after much suffering, Protestant leaders accept or court government blessing. To outside observers, overt political involvement as church institutions seems a spurious application of [Romans 13:1](#) and an inconsistent turnabout. Many Protestant churches long preached that politics was of the devil; when Jesus returns *only* He will clean up that realm. Thus,

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<sup>50</sup> Latourette, *Expansion*, VII, 172.

<sup>51</sup> Nelson, 65.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 54, author's translation.

<sup>53</sup> I have argued this point in 'Searching for Ways of Mission in Revolution,' *Reformed Ecumenical Synod Mission Bulletin*, August 1983.

involvement in *la política* was taboo. A naivete related to that discussed earlier developed in the face of imported political ideas that were considered part of Christianity. Although Protestants were not hearing expressly political issues in their churches' ministries, the message that invading communism was responsible for *any* social unrest got through. Lack of full-orbed Christian education on political issues turned Christians gullible. So when dictators equate their p. 241 policies with God's will, many bewildered Christians embrace those ideas uncritically. There is, though, a tragic flipside to this acceptance: Some believers who have suffered for their faith become suspicious of such capitulation on the part of their leaders. Those people reject the partial faith that serves neither them nor the Gospel well.

Thus a partial faith is tied in closely with the development of a partial theology. Both are products of imported attitudes and teachings. The locus of the partial theology largely responsible for creating blind spots is the eschatology that has become the tail that wags the dog. The dispensationalism mentioned earlier combines with a premillennialism that awaits Christ's 1000-year rule. This theology first came from the CAM, but it has spread to most evangelical and Pentecostal churches as well.

Originally, dispensational theology helped create missionary urgency. Today its eschatology has become caricatured and occupies altogether too large a part of the message of salvation. In its popular forms, all focuses on the rapture of the Church; believers are preoccupied with being on the right side of the rapture.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the selections from prophecy that dispensationalist preachers use put a political tint on their messages. Those who accept and preach this caricatured form of dispensationalism constantly, and perhaps knowingly, become effective public relations agents for dictatorial governments. Their perception of the Soviet Union as the beast from the North also coincides with U.S. foreign policy toward Central America. In turn, Protestant churches that preach this message do the very thing that they wished to avoid: they become politicized.

Premillennial dispensationalism need not fall into such a trap. If handled responsibly, as several dispensationalist writers and teachers are doing, dispensational theology still focuses on eschatology.<sup>55</sup> It properly relates the Kingdom of God, however, to God's cosmic rule and well-being for all his people without making the United States and Israel guardians of the Kingdom's future.

Another Protestant doctrine also has fallen into caricature by misuse. Despite their divisiveness, the Pentecostals have awakened their members to the importance of divine miracles, particularly as they apply to illnesses. While this renewed emphasis is a needed corrective, a mutant form has, predictably, developed. In classic theology, miracles are considered part of God's cosmic rule of p. 242 Providence. Recent over-emphasis on miracle in Pentecostalism has raised to a cardinal rule of faith the need to experience miracles for every ache and pain. Fruit of the faith has become creed.

Although itself a serious problem like so much else in Central America, it has found political expression. When Ríos Montt came to power in Guatemala many evangelicals immediately viewed his *coupe d'état* as a miracle. At last God had shown some power in an area he had left to Satan's minions for so long. Such a conclusion ignores Providence in failing to recognize God's work in processes and not just in lightning bolts. When Ríos Montt fell after months of gradual slippage, some Protestants were trying to unsay things they had said while he was in power. Such a concrete example of misapplication of a true

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<sup>54</sup> Nelson, 54.

<sup>55</sup> See for example Emilio Antonio Núñez, 'La Naturaleza del Reino de Dios,' *El Reino de Dios y América Latina*, C. René Padilla, ed. (Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1975), 17-36.

and necessary doctrine is not, however, unique to Guatemala. Not a few left-leaning *evangélicos* in Nicaragua saw the Sandinista victory as the anteroom to God's kingdom. There, as more recently in Guatemala, conscientious biblical political education as part of ongoing discipleship could have avoided grievous errors.

## CONCLUSION

In review, we see that North American missions have made a significant impact on Central America. In a positive sense, Protestant missions have served God's purposes by distributing His Word; they have won millions to Christ; they and their churches have improved the physical and spiritual lives of many by freeing them from vices, by establishing training schools and establishing institutions of higher learning. Nevertheless, the theology accompanying much of this work has been partial, superficial and often politically tendentious. In a negative sense, we see a fragmented Protestantism that has not been able to unite, despite several long-term and notable attempts. Most recently the ill feelings between the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) and the Latin American Evangelical Confederation (CONELA) illustrate anew the divisions. The competition began to emerge only after CLAI appeared to gain a foothold among many churches. The divisions and fragility of unions have permitted Protestantism to fall into political traps. In politically charged Central America such partisanship threatens to separate Christians ever further.

By no means is all grim, however. Protestantism grew in Central America by the fruit of God's Word—*sola scriptura*. Another foundational doctrine of the Reformation—the priesthood of all believers—also functions biblically by providing leaders who live the [p. 243](#) grace and faith of [Ephesians 2:11–12](#). Even more significantly, we must note in concluding that in the camp of the once-enemy Roman Catholics, those two doctrines are helping to bring about grassroots and some institutional changes that may portend a unity of Christian sisters and brothers once more.

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## Key Issues in Missiology Today

John Gration

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It needs to be recognized at the outset that any agenda of missiological issues will to a degree be inevitably determined by one's perspectives. These include one's theological perspective. The agenda of the conciliar movement differs considerably from that movement which is commonly designated evangelical. The agenda likewise varies between those who are Reformed and those who come out of a non-Reformed tradition.



One's ethnic and economic perspectives are also factors. Even as we read the Bible with cultural glasses, so also we see the issue of missions through our cultural glasses. A call for a theology of the poor or a theology of justice is more likely to come out of the Third World or the inner city than out of a North America suburban context. For example, one does not find many Latin evangelicals excited about the issues raised in Arthur Johnston's *The Battle for World Evangelism*.<sup>1</sup>

Realizing then, the importance of perspective in general and of the relationship between theory and practice in particular, I would like to suggest a number of issues that are critical from an evangelical point of view.

## CHURCH AND KINGDOM

The relationship between the church and the kingdom and the significance of this relationship to missions should receive increasing attention on the part of evangelicals.<sup>2</sup> The answers to a number of questions depend upon the nature of this relationship. First, what is the primary aim of evangelism? Is it to preach Christ and the kingdom, or to plant churches? If this is not the best way to put it, we might ask whether the task of missions is based on the nature of the church or the nature of the kingdom. Is God's work in this age primarily 'calling out a people for his name' ([Acts 15:14](#)), or extending and building Christ's kingdom on earth ([Acts 15:16](#))? (This entire [Acts 15](#) passage merits careful exegetical study.) **P. 245**

To put the question still another way, is the growth (expansion and extension) of churches the ultimate goal of mission, or is the church simply a result of the gospel proclamation, the 'first fruits' of the manifestation and reality of the kingdom?<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that Peter Wagner devotes a chapter to the kingdom in his book *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*—a book that constitutes one answer to the various critics of the church growth school of thought.<sup>4</sup>

## MISSION AND EVANGELISM

A number of issues grow out of the distinction between mission and evangelism. They could reflect problems of semantics, or they could reflect a deep divergence. What does the 'mission of the church' embrace? What does it exclude? Is it '... everything the church is sent into the world to do?'<sup>5</sup> Or is Donald McGavran correct when he affirms that 'A chief and irreplaceable purpose of mission is church growth?'<sup>6</sup>

What is the meaning of 'evangelism'? How weighted and freighted should this word become? Does it signify the proclamation of the good news of God's redemptive purposes in Jesus Christ, or does 'evangelism' inherently commit us to a 'wholistic evangelism' that embraces social service and social action?

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism*. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> As an example see Peter Kuzmicû, 'The Church and the Kingdom of God.' Unpublished paper of the International Conference on the Nature and Mission of the Church, June 20–July 1, 1983, Wheaton, Ill.

<sup>3</sup> Orlando Costas. *Christ Outside the Gate*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982, p.43.

<sup>4</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, New York: Harper and Row, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1975, p.30.

<sup>6</sup> Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1970, p.32.

Note that the question is not, 'Do we engage in social service and action?' but 'Is this an inherent part of evangelism?'<sup>7</sup> We are not concerned here with either the concomitants or the results of evangelism but with what evangelism is in itself. Which views of evangelism are too wide? Which views are too narrow? Our answer will determine our response to Costas' assertion that,

The church is faithful to her witnessing vocation when she becomes a catalyst for God's liberating action in the world of poverty, exploitation, hunger, guilt and despair by standing in solidarity with people, by showing p. 246 them with concrete actions that God cares and wills to save them and by helping them to understand material and moral roots of their situation.<sup>8</sup>

## THE GOSPEL AND SALVATION

This brings us to a consideration of the meaning of 'gospel.' Padilla and others accuse evangelicals of proclaiming a truncated, emasculated gospel, an easy believism, and 'cheap grace.'<sup>9</sup> To what extent is this accusation justified?

The nature of the gospel focuses on two questions: What does the gospel offer? and, What does the gospel demand? Is it proper and biblical to speak of the 'demands' of the gospel, if the only 'demand' of the gospel is 'to truly repent, which means to accept the good news and submit to God's love?'<sup>10</sup> What is the balance between 'cheap grace' and "exorbitant grace"? And who sets the agenda of repentance—the evangelizer or the receptor of the gospel?

We have referred to God's redemptive purposes. These I equate with salvation. This brings us to another key issue, namely, what is the meaning of 'salvation'? Without going into all aspects of the question from either an historical or a biblical perspective, reference might be made to Section II of the 1973 Bangkok 'Salvation Today' Conference. This section dealt with salvation and social justice and viewed salvation as primarily a social-historical process. It spoke of Christ 'working out his plan of salvation in history' and concluded that 'the present-day struggle for liberation and justice must have some salvific significance.'<sup>11</sup> The meaning of 'salvation' to many gathered at Bangkok becomes clear in the light of the following statement:

The salvation which Christ brought, and in which we participate, offers a comprehensive wholeness in this divided life. We understand salvation as newness of life—the unfolding of true humanity in the fulness of God (Col. 2:9). It is the salvation of the soul and the body, of the individual and p. 247 society, mankind and the 'groaning creation' (Rom. 8:19). As evil works both in personal life and in exploitative social structures which humiliate humankind, so God's justice manifests itself both in the justification of the sinner and in social and political justice. As guilt is both individual and corporate so God's liberating

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<sup>7</sup> For a positive response to this question see Michael Green, 'Evangelism in the Early Church.' *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*. Edited by J. D. Douglas, Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975, pp.175–176.

<sup>8</sup> Orlando Costas. 'Evangelism and the Gospel of Salvation,' *International Review of Missions*. LXII 249, January, 1974, p.33.

<sup>9</sup> Rene Padilla, 'Evangelism and the World.' *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, pp.126–131.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Kraus, 'Today's Gospel of Salvation.' *Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth*, edited by C. Norman Kraus. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1980, p.77. See also Orlando Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982, pp.79–80, 92–93.

<sup>11</sup> Kraus, p.67.



power changes both persons and structures. We have to overcome the dichotomies in our thinking between soul and body, person and society, humankind and creation. Therefore we see the struggles for economic justice, political freedom and cultural renewal as elements in the total liberation of the world through the mission of God.<sup>12</sup>

So what does 'salvation' mean to us as evangelicals? Is it simply the receiving of Christ as one's Lord and Savior resulting in individual deliverance from the varied results of sin? Or is it the advent of God's kingly rule to earth? In this connection it may be asked if there is a biblical and non-biblical social gospel. Periodically I hear fundamentalists castigated for narrowly rejecting Rauschenbusch's 'social gospel.' But was the problem with this gospel only one of emphasis? Or was there also a deep theological flaw? Is it theologically correct to speak of the kingdom of God as 'humanity organized according to the will of God' á la Rauschenbusch?<sup>13</sup> Is it biblical to speak of 'Christianizing the social order' and 'the salvation of the superpersonal forces,' that is, 'the economic, social, and political institutions of society'?<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, how does this view of the kingdom of God as the ultimate ethical ideal for society differ from Costas' statement that '... history, in spite of all its contradictions and failures, is being moved by the Holy Spirit toward the final consummation of God's kingdom'?<sup>15</sup> Watson suggests that in his stimulating volume, *Christ Outside the Gate*, Costas affirms that 'the *missio Dei* confronts us with a choice: whether to join God in the task of bringing in the New Age or to seek to create 'ecclesial compounds' which shelter and ultimately alienate from the world.'<sup>16</sup> Even if we grant a certain validity to such statements, how is evangelicalism preserved from the practical p. 248 consequences of such an approach; namely, losing the priority of verbal evangelism?

## THE LOSTNESS OF HUMANITY

Another important issue has to do with the fate of those who have never heard the gospel. Does evangelicalism have an incipient, assumed, and silent version of Rahner's 'anonymous Christian,' or at least a modified universalism?<sup>17</sup> A survey done at Urbana a few years ago would seem to bear out this conclusion.<sup>18</sup> Does our relative silence on the subjects of the lostness of all men, hell, and an eternal judgment say something about what we really believe on these subjects? Do we believe that God has a back-up plan, a plan B, if the church fails in its missionary obligation?

Does the bugaboo of dichotomizing, the one great, unforgivable missiological sin of the '80's, keep us from distinguishing between the relative importance of the body and

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<sup>12</sup> 'Section II: Salvation and Social Justice.' Bangkok Assembly 1973: Minutes and Report of the Assembly of the Commission on World Missions and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. New York: World Council of Churches, 1973.

<sup>13</sup> Kraus describes some of these issues. The questions are mine. See Kraus, 'Introduction: Evangelism, Missions, and Church Growth.' *Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth*, p.21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate*, p.40.

<sup>16</sup> David Watson, 'Review of Christ Outside the Gate.' *TSF Bulletin*, VI 4, March-April, 1983, p.18.

<sup>17</sup> See Alfred Krass, *Evangelizing Neopagan North America* Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1982, pp.64, 65.

<sup>18</sup> Paul F. Barkman, Edward R. Dayton, and Edward L. Gruman. *Christian Collegians and Foreign Missions*. Monrovia, Calif.: MARC, 1969, pp.28, 184, 232.

material things and the eternal value of the soul? Our Lord may never have dichotomized, but he certainly made some strong distinctions ([Matt. 6:33](#); [Luke 12:13–21](#) ).

## THE CHURCH AND PARACHURCH GROUPS

Other issues relate to the church vs. the parachurch debate. Helpful in understanding this debate are Howard Snyder's two books, *The Problem of Wineskins* and *Community of the King*.<sup>19</sup> However, we might ask when does the 'church'—in certain aspects of its organization and manifestation—become 'parachurch'? If a Conservative Baptist church is a church, is the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society parachurch? Just what do we mean by 'parachurch'? Furthermore, is the contrast between the organic and charismatic, and institutional and organizational, views of the church a valid contrast? Is not organizational structure an essential part of the nature of the visible church? I tend to think it is. **P. 249**

## GOSPEL AND CULTURE

Certainly one of the key issues on the current missiological agenda is the whole question of the gospel and culture. We must continue to live with the tension between them, but will the pressure to contextualize permit culture to alter the gospel? Will the context take precedence over the text of Scripture? Will over-contextualizing lead to syncretism? These are important questions.

Of course, the tension between Christianity and culture can also result in an 'unconscious contextualizing' and syncretism in the North American church where Christianity all too often becomes equated with American values.<sup>20</sup> It is with this in mind that Padilla points to the 'culture Christianity' of North America.<sup>21</sup>

Again, we might inquire as to the definitions of indigenization and contextualization. In what ways does contextualization go beyond the three-self definition?<sup>22</sup> For example, are Latinos in Chicago who effect basic General Baptist or Reformed ecclesiastical models of church government contextualizing? Have we changed the actors but kept the same script? Have we touched the essence, or applied cosmetics? Are we witnessing a 'missiological Halloween ball' where people are masquerading as something they really are not?

While seeking to spell out the role of the Bible in all of these questions we are driven back to basic hermeneutical questions. What is normative for all time? And what is related only to biblical times and culture? These are all-important issues. Let us remember that inerrancy becomes irrelevant if we lose biblical truth through the back door of cultural and ethical relativity.

## POVERTY AND JUSTICE

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<sup>19</sup> Howard Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age*, *Community of the King*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 1977.

<sup>20</sup> Philip Yancey, 'Learning from Gandhi,' *Christianity Today*, Vol. 27, No. 7, April, 1983, pp.19, 20. See also Alfred Krass, *Evangelizing Neopagan North America*, pp.118–151.

<sup>21</sup> Rene Padilla. 'Evangelism and the World,' *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, pp.125–127.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Taber, 'Contextualization: Indigenization and/or Transformation,' *The Gospel and Islam*. Edited by Don McCurry, Monrovia, Calif. MARC, 1979.

We cannot sidestep the issue of poverty. Who are the biblical 'poor' whom God is on the side of? In what sense is he on their side? What does world poverty say to American evangelical affluence? What does it say to the lifestyle of American missionaries? What does it say to our credibility? Are we prepared emotionally, psychologically, and **P. 250** spiritually to minister in a context of poverty? As we face the call for a growing partnership with Third World missions, we must ask if this is realistically possible, given our present standards of affluence in the West.

Closely allied with the challenge of poverty is that of justice. We are told that we must find where God is active in bringing about justice in society and join him in that endeavor. This approach raises a host of problems for evangelicals. But where does the evangelical missionary stand in the struggle for justice? Is justice a World Council of Churches concern only? How does this whole question affect our loyalty to governments, to the status quo? And above all, our loyalty to the gospel of which justice is an integral part? Harvie Conn's new book, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*, addresses these issues.<sup>23</sup>

## MISSIONARY TRAINING

Finally, we must ask ourselves whether or not our missionary candidates are being adequately trained for mission in the years ahead. We talk about wholistic mission and wholistic evangelism. What about wholistic education for missions that concerns itself as much with spiritual 'formation' as with intellectual and cognitive development? Will our M.A. and M.Div. programs prepare students for missionary service in the '80s and '90s? Are they going to be viewed as too costly and time-consuming when one can become an instant missionary by going out short-term and thus bypass a lot of the requirements generally thought to be necessary for the career missionary?

These are some of the questions I face as I peer through a knothole-like window from the second floor of the Graham Center and into a confused and needy world. Obviously, they are not mine alone. They appear on the agendas of many a missiological forum. But for my part, I earnestly pray that the future will afford many more opportunities to discuss and strategize concerning them, with my fellow evangelical missiologists.

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# Karl Marx's Negation of Christianity: A Theological Response

Klaus Bockmuehl

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<sup>23</sup> Harvie Conn, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.

*Marxism is more than an economic theology; it is a comprehensive way of life—an ideology. In the 100th year anniversary of Karl Marx's death Klaus Bockmuehl looks afresh at Marx's negation of and challenge to Christianity. He argues that Marx's analysis of human alienation must be answered in theory and in practice with the reality of the New Man in society. He calls for self-criticism and a new identity with Christ.*  
(Editor)

Karl Marx, the intellectual father of Marxism, died one hundred years ago. Does this mean that Marxism is dead? Did it die with him? Did it die under the inevitable critical judgment of the next generation? Did Marxism die from the theoretical manipulations and changes made to it by its own disciples? Did it die perhaps from the evidence of its practical application in some parts of the world? Or is Marxism among the 'living faiths and world views', which the World Council of Churches speaks of and does dialogue with?

Some years ago Russian dissidents, upon their arrival in the West, declared that Marxism was dead as an ideology in Soviet Russia. Now the same people seem to have revised judgment, they say: Marxism is deadly.

Indeed, in the past ten years, in the last decade of the century that has passed since the death of Karl Marx, we have witnessed both the military expansion and the ideological advance of Marxism. This is certainly true of the global picture which the Christian, mindful of the Great Commission, should always have before his eyes. It may also become true for North America where Marxist thinking unexpectedly arrives for discussion not from the East, or over the Bering Strait, but from the South, from Latin America, in the company of 'Liberation Theology'.

Today, as we think of Karl Marx' death one hundred years ago, we are, therefore, not just conversing with a figure of past history; we are very much discussing a current concern. Perhaps part of the reason that this is so lies in the fact that Marxism is not just an economic [p. 252](#) theory but a comprehensive philosophy of life, a world view, in short: an ideology. This very quality of Marxism makes it also a critic and competitor of Christianity.

In the following, we shall discuss some of Marxism's basic tenets as they immediately throw a challenge at the Christian faith, under the three headings of Atheism, Humanism, and Communism.

## **PRACTICAL ATHEISM AS SOVEREIGN MAN**

Marx' historical comment, 'Communism begins with Atheism' (3,297) is echoed by the whole structure of his own philosophy.

For Marx, religion is 'an untruth, even if an existing untruth' (3,28). It is the self-alienation of man: 'The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself' (3,272). 'God is all that man is not' (4,160). Religion empties the world of man and transfers its whole contents into the 'fantastic reality of heaven' (3,174). Instead of raising up humanity from its sufferings, religion points it to otherworldly consolations. Thus religion is, if not a lie, then an illusion. It effects only an 'illusory happiness', it is 'the opium of the people' (3,175f.). Moreover, whenever man assumes the existence of another being above himself and nature which he acknowledges to be *ens realissimum*, the most real being; man himself and nature become unreal and unessential. Christianity is the perfection of all religion as the self-estrangement of man (3,173).

One particular Christian doctrine seems to be annoying to Karl Marx: Creation, understood as the Kingdom of God. For him, the concept of creation emphasises the non-essentiality of man. He argues as follows: If I owe not only the maintenance of my life but also its creation and thus my whole existence to the grace of another being, then I cannot

see myself as free and independent (3,304). But man must be free. Therefore, Marx is prepared to contradict the concept of creation, although he thinks it is difficult to eliminate because it seems to be supported by all the palpable evidence of practical life. Nevertheless, he takes up the construct of *generatio aequivoca*, a process of the selfgeneration of the earth, in order to replace the concept of creation. Respectively, he speaks of man's evolutionary selfgeneration through his own work (3,305; 3,342). For, if man had a Creator, he would also have a Lord all along. And that is where the crux lies. Quoting Hamlet's famous line, 'that is the question', Marx sums up the alternative: 'Is God sovereign, or is man? One of the two is an untruth ...' (3,28).

What is to be done? Answer: Not only replace, but reverse the p. 253 creation theory: 'The fundament of all critique of religion is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man' (3,175). 'Criticism of religion disillusion man', so that he regains his senses and 'moves around himself as his own true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself' (3,176). The reversal of the creation theory effects the reestablishment of man as the highest being. God must be removed in order that man might be recovered. For Marx, atheism is necessary for reasons of philanthropy (3,297), of attaining a theoretical as well as practical humanism. Therefore 'Communism begins with atheism'.

Two qualifications have to be made of the atheism of Marx. First, the practical corollary to his atheism is *secularism*. Whereas atheism can be understood as the theoretical denial of the existence of God, secularism describes the respective practical attitude: living and acting as if God did not exist. If atheism is the epistemological decision, secularism is its moral equivalent. Marx intends consistency of atheism, in theory and practice, in thought and life. That could be gleaned already from the sure grip with which he made the question of sovereignty—man's or God's—the foundational question. It is this decision which today makes Marxism the cutting edge of secularism, compared with which Capitalist secularity is still ridden with compromise.

Second, the atheism of Karl Marx is not of the cool, detached species. It is redhot and *passionate*. For Marx, Prometheus, the figure of Greek mythology that stands for rebellion against the gods, is 'the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar'. Marx leaves no doubt that he shares Prometheus' confession: 'In simple words, I hate the pack of gods' (1,3 of.). The titanic posture of Prometheus, the ancient legendary figure, surfaces already in Marx' early poems of 1837 where he invokes the human urge to build his own world, 'to be a creator of the universe himself'.

Marx here seems to participate in the mood of mid-nineteenth century atheism. He comes close to the stance of Michael Bakunin, the father of Anarchism, later his colleague in the 'First International' who prided himself in reversing Voltaire's famous saying 'If God did not exist, one would have to invent Him' into 'If God really existed, one would have to abolish him'. Marx' atheism also resembles the sentiments of Friedrich Nietzsche who makes his Zarathustra say: 'Away with a god! Rather have no god, rather be God yourself!' And in 1888 Nietzsche wrote to a friend: 'The coming years will see the world upside down. After the old God has abdicated, from now on I shall rule the world.' Marx, of course, would have found it absurd to say p. 254 such a thing about himself as an individual; however, in terms of humanity, the proposition fits his mind.

Marx' secularism is charged with the same high-spirited attitude. Marx shows himself confident that the miracles of the gods have been 'rendered superfluous by the miracles of industry' (3,278). He seems to echo the confidence of his mentor Ludwig Feuerbach who felt that in a time of fire insurance companies and steam trains, the God of Providence was no longer needed. The weakness of humanity had been overcome by its own inventions. Humanity was potentially almighty. One remembers similarly euphoric



declarations from the recent phase of another 'God is dead' philosophy which ruled the scene for a short time just before the first oil crisis and before the public became aware of the magnitude of the ecological crisis brought about by man's over-confident regime of nature.

## **NATURE HUMANISM AND THE REAL MAN**

We have already pointed out that, for Marxism, atheism is a presupposition, a means to an aim. The aim is the inthronisation of man as the highest being. That is the overtone of his characterisation of atheism as philanthropy: philanthropy not just in the usual sense of a disposition to charity. Marx actually borrows some of the Old Testament zeal to make his point in an unmistakable fashion: human self-consciousness is the highest divinity, and Marx 'will have none other beside' (1,30).

When Marx here uses the term 'human self-consciousness', he is using the language he used in 1841, the year of the completion of his doctoral dissertation. This was before he absorbed the naturalist humanism of Ludwig Feuerbach who also furnished him with the mature form of his criticism of religion. Marx' praise for Feuerbach includes a hint of his own change of perspective, from an emphasis on 'human self-consciousness' to the espousal of 'real man'. Marx says about Feuerbach that he 'was the first to complete the criticism of religion', as he dissolved the 'metaphysical Absolute Spirit' of Hegel's idealism into 'real man on the basis of nature' (4,139). Not the Absolute Spirit, as Hegel held, nor some mythical Lady History is the subject of world events, but 'real, living man'. From this new vantage point even the term 'human self-consciousness' which Marx had then borrowed from his radical Young-Hegelian friend Bruno Bauer and given prominence in his doctoral dissertation, was an abstraction that needed to be sent back to its source: real, empirical man in his constant correlation with nature. [p. 255](#)

The humanist stance must therefore be qualified as 'real humanism'. Man cannot be understood correctly if his material living conditions, e.g. 'his vulgar body which may live deep down in an English cellar or at the top of a French block of flats' (4,80) are left out of the account. If we are to do justice to man, Marx argues against his former colleague Bruno Bauer, we must, besides idealistic good will, 'demand ... very tangible, very material conditions' (4,95). Mere thinking does not change 'practical debasement', and 'the workers in the Manchester or Lyons workshops ... are most painfully aware of the difference between being and thinking, between consciousness and life' (4,53).

The same is true for human life in general. Man is part of nature, a nature being, and vice-versa, 'Nature is man's larger inorganic body', 'with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die' (3,276). It is therefore utterly inadequate to consider man apart from his bodily, natural existence. This is what Marx means when he speaks of 'materialism' or 'naturalism' as necessary qualifications of the concept of humanism. This perspective will later be enlarged to the theory of 'historical materialism' which postulates the recognition of economic forces as the 'basis', and as decisive for the development of the 'superstructure' of culture: politics, law, religion, the arts etc.

At this point, the very stance of Marxism is again consciously held in criticism of Christianity. Not only has Christianity, as Marx said earlier, made man secondary to God, but its whole idea of man is idealistic, corrupted by other-worldliness. Christianity is the energy behind the reductionism that characterises the concept of man in the philosophy of idealism. The cue here is what Marx holds to be the basic Christian 'dogma of the antithesis between Spirit and Matter, between God and the World' (4,85). Any philosopher who substitutes 'spirit' or 'mind' for real, individual man, reiterates at bottom the Christian position which declares 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth



nothing'. It is this very attitude which makes Christianity the pinnacle of 'the theoretical estrangement of man from himself and from nature' (3,173). Correspondingly, Marx and Engels state in the opening sentence of their book of 1845, 'The Holy Family': 'Real humanism therefore has no more dangerous enemy than this spiritualism' (4,7) which in another place they predicate as 'theological inhumanity' (4,93).

If Christian theology and idealistic philosophy are the theory of human self-alienation and estrangement from nature, they must also in effect become the sanction and legitimation of all practical, empirical, corporeal alienations of man, and a decisive obstacle to their proposed removal. It is for this reason that the criticism of religion precedes and p. 256 accompanies the critique of the practical debasements of man, the critique of politics and economics.

On both counts, then, in theory and in practice, Marx spells out the total loss of humanity which must be countered by a total recovery of man (3,186) from its religious, economic and political estrangements. Presently, humanity—above all the working class—has a semblance of human existence only, but the reality of an inhuman existence (4,36). It is the victim of a contradiction between true human nature on the one hand and a perverted practical life situation on the other. Therefore, according to Marx, whoever believes in man as the highest being for man, must also vouch for man's 'liberation' (3,187), for 'the categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being ...' (3,182). That would be real, practical humanism.

## **FINAL COMMUNISM AS THE SOCIAL MAN**

'Man in his uncivilised, unsocial form'—and that is 'man ... just as he is (today), corrupted by the whole organisation of our society' (3,159)—suffers from yet another estrangement. Not only is he alienated from himself and from human nature as his indispensable foundation, he is also estranged from his fellow-man. Today, all interhuman relationships are affected by the breakdown of the social cement of true humanity. Again, Marx speaks of a practical alienation and of its theoretical counterpart.

The practical 'separation and remoteness of man from man' can be seen already in the very structure of contemporary society: in it the individual is sovereign. The French Revolution, in securing civil rights for everybody, may have achieved political emancipation but it did not come anywhere near human emancipation, i.e. the establishment of human brotherhood. In fact, it practically opened the door to a fragmentation of society through economic competition, making everybody everybody else's enemy, to a degree unheard of in the previous age of feudalism and guilds. Political emancipation merely fanned individual egoism (3,168), and actually facilitated 'the universal unrestrained movement of the elementary forces of life freed from the fetters of privilege'. 'Civil society as a whole' is now 'this war against one another of all individuals' (4,116). It has developed into the anarchy of 'so-called free competition' (3,242). Its signature is Private Property which fundamentally denies the principles of philanthropy and human togetherness.

For Marx, Christianity again is the theoretical expression of the p. 257 existing practical fragmentation of society. Christianity essentially separates man from man. Originally, Marx here seems to follow the assessment of early Christianity in the philosophy of German Idealism. Hegel, for instance, praised Christianity, for having established 'the infinite worth of the individual soul', for the first time in human history. Later, e.g. in the appendix to his doctoral dissertation (representing his first systematic criticism of religion) as well as in his article 'On the Jewish Question' of 1843, Marx blamed especially

Christian eschatology, in his words the 'Christian egoism of heavenly bliss' (3,174), for what he felt was the socially disintegrating force of the Christian faith: 'Religion ... expresses, the separation and remoteness of man from man' (3,159). Again, on another occasion, Marx criticised what he saw as the 'religious hypocrisy' which, imagining some fictitious saviour, 'takes away from the other man what he has deserved in respect of me in order to give to God' (4,173). Protesting this, Marx insists that man is essentially and must again become in reality a 'Gattungswesen', i.e. a social being. Or, in even stronger terms: we must realise that the greatest wealth of the human being is the other human being (3,304). Therefore people must associate again and overcome the dreadful divisions which presently cut up the body of the great 'St. Humanus'. Thus the postulate of Communism.

First, the practical forms of estrangement of man from man must be abolished: private property must be replaced by common ownership, and competition by the joint and reasonable organisation of production according to plan. That is the task for 'the next period of historical development in the emancipation and recovery of mankind' (3,306).

But this is not all; the abolition of private property is not the final goal of human development. Rather, that goal must be the establishment of true commonality of human life generally, of a truly 'human, i.e. social existence' (3,297). A change in property structures is only the external prerequisite for the 'reintegration or return of man to himself' (3,296), a much deeper, anthropological purpose.

We are here faced with the greater problem of a change in human nature itself, of the creation of a 'new type of man', a change that goes far beyond a change in social structures. Marx approvingly quotes a passage from Rousseau who pointed out that, if there was to be a new society, each individual also needed to be transformed from a merely solitary, isolated, individual existence into a social being and a responsible part of the whole. 'Only then' would 'human emancipation', i.e. the indispensable humanisation of man 'be accomplished' (3,167f.). [p. 258](#)

## **OUR THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE**

We have seen that Marxism holds a number of essential beliefs which, by their very nature, must be of interest to the Christian. It has been shown in addition, that Marxism's positive tenets were each and all understood as so many critical attacks on Christianity. This is obviously true for his stance of atheism, but also for what he saw as communism and 'real humanism'. Marx understood his position throughout as a negation of the Christian religion.

How is Christian theology to respond to these attacks? Must it submit to the criticism proposed? Should it feel misrepresented? Or should we think that Marx did understand Christianity correctly, but unfortunately made the wrong choice himself? We will look at his proposals, in reverse order.

### **NEIGHBOUR-CENTRED STEWARDSHIP—OUR RESPONSE TO COMMUNISM**

Christianity, as depicted in the Bible, clearly stands for the principle of community. Jesus declared love of God and love of neighbour to be the two great commandments, both of equal weight, even if love of God came first. As his definition of the commandment to love one's neighbour he gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. At the end of this story it becomes plain that Jesus replaced the prevalent ego-centric picture of ethics with a

neighbour-centred orientation. Concern for one's neighbour in need overruled concern for oneself.

The early church followed this teaching in practice. Christians shared their possessions. The apostle Paul arranged for a large-scale solidarity collection taken in Europe for the afflicted church overseas. There is no room here to list all the phenomena and facts that are evidence for Christianity's emphasis on fellowship. This concern goes beyond the borders of the established church, too, to the advocacy of commonalities in the life of society in general.

In terms of modern politics and economics, Christians would always support the cooperative and participatory principle instead of the adversary approach in industry. Christianity certainly does not, as Marx suggested, stand for the principle of 'unrestrained movement' of the social forces, or for unlimited competition. This attitude is outrightly eliminated by the fact that Scripture does not teach human autonomy and exclusive, absolute private property holding (that is the stance of Roman Law), but the principle of stewardship, of man's responsible tenancy of creation, within the framework of God's commandments. To turn Christianity into a theory of political p. 259 individualism, exclusive private property and unrestrained competition is a historical construct that borders on the ridiculous: one might then also claim that Christianity had triggered the French Revolution of 1789 because it enacted political emancipation although it became the victim of the Revolution. A similar unevenness emerges, by the way, when Marx postulates unlimited liberty of man regarding God, but deplores it in society.

The property question, raised everywhere by Communism according to the Communist Manifesto, clearly needs to be faced squarely and must be answered by Christian theology which has been somewhat deficient in the field. However, it is obvious that Christianity has never advocated the compulsory institution of common property, although it always encouraged common property holding as a voluntary measure. It never stood for the general communisation of individual properties, not the least because that would be but a mechanistic and thus unsuccessful attempt to obtain true commonality. Such a programme is ridden with problems, as the varied history of the theme in the Soviet Union demonstrates. True brotherhood and association presuppose an unselfish mind, heart, and motivation. The establishment of common property holding is, as are all changes of structure, merely a legal measure, and we know from the New Testament that the law can indeed restrain the evildoer, but it cannot change the heart and bring about the 'new man' and an ideal society. It indeed takes a change of human nature in the individual to make a person unselfish and willing beyond the observance of restrictions and laws.

## **COSTLY SOCIAL SERVICE AS A RESPONSE TO MARXIST HUMANISM**

Biblical Christianity certainly agrees that it is necessary and, indeed, obligatory to be concerned not only with a person's soul, but also with the body. This is again made quite obvious in the parable of the Good Samaritan as Christ's explanation of the commandment to love one's neighbour. The righteous deed there consists of physical caretaking. Jesus equated doing good with saving life ([Mark 3:4](#)), and he taught the famous list of the so-called six bodily works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, and grant fellowship to the sick and the captive—as the standards of the Judgment to come ([Mt. 25:31–46](#)).

Almost the whole of Jesus' earthly career was a succession of healings. In the last analysis, everything he did represented, as it were, the continuation of God's work of

sustainment of creation, on a higher [p. 260](#) level. Seen from this point of view, even his work of salvation is sustainment extraordinary.

We are primarily pointing at Jesus because it seems to be necessary for any inquirer to study Christianity in the person, the teaching, and the actions of Christ, just as we try to assess Marxism from a study of the writings of Karl Marx. Perhaps Marx would not wish to be judged by an evaluation, say, of the politics of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge although they are confessed Marxists.

The concern for 'real humanism' is present not only in Jesus' own teaching and action but also in the letters of the apostles, e.g. when, almost with the same words, James warns Christians to care for the poor not only with sweet and comforting words. This is echoed in the letters of John who urges Christians to love not with words, but with deeds. John wants to see a practical Christianity. He seems to come very close to the sentiment recently expressed by a native Canadian at the Vancouver Conference of the World Council of Churches when he said: 'I tell the church: get real, or get lost!'

With the concern for 'real humanism' in mind, one might also scan the history of the Church to see whether it showed any practical appreciation of the teaching and example of its master. The early church soon began to copy Christ in his feeding of the masses. Christians were the initiators of health care and hospitals. To the present day, it is still true that atheists seldom go out to set up clinics for lepers and other diseased persons, except when aroused by the challenge of Christianity's track record.

In this regard, it is remarkable that Marx, when he pronounced the principle of 'real humanism' that was also to take into account the human body, always seemed to think of the poor and oppressed, but not also of the sick. Marx proposed 'to upturn human conditions'. Jesus seems to have opted for the immediate personal encounter and healing—and perhaps that was the only method that would indeed help the sick.

In all of this, one cannot fairly accuse Christianity of being preoccupied with otherworldliness. Even the 'essentiality of nature', that Marx was concerned with, may, in the long run, be better safeguarded by someone who considers himself a responsible tenant in creation, than by someone who feels he is the master of the universe who would be responsible to no-one.

The same goes for the 'essentiality of man' and the protection of his dignity. Marxists emphasise the responsibility of the individual to the collective, practically replacing God with The Group. Some of them have attempted to inculcate social conscience by way of psychological [p. 261](#) manipulation. Against this, one would do well to remember that already in antiquity Cicero observed the astonishing individuality of conscience which would continue to accuse one's evil even against a thousand voices condoning it. Again, we are faced with the difficulty that brotherliness cannot be legislated or even inculcated by way of psychological training. 'Strength to love' is a quality not generated by human art alone.

The Bible insists that God himself is the true guarantor of our neighbour's life. On the other hand we are aware of the historical evidence that the proclamation of atheism was often followed by the practical elimination of freedom and the abuse of the defenceless. A humanity without God produces a humanity without fellow-man. This leads on to our last point: the question of atheism.

## **FREEDOM IN SERVANTHOOD RESPONDS TO FREEDOM IN ATHEISM**

The primary concern behind Karl Marx' option for atheism seems to have been not so much human dignity, as unlimited freedom for man. He took faith in God to be acquiescence to human servitude. It was already perplexing to see that Marx only allowed

for the alternatives of either individualism or collectivism, placing Christianity on the bad side: individualism. He did not allow for a third option, Christianity's own social concept of brotherhood which recognizes the gift of personhood and individuality before God, in the midst of a fellowship. It is similarly disturbing that Marx, like Feuerbach, Bakunin, and Nietzsche, seems to have been unable to think of God's authority without seeing the freedom of man endangered. But cannot man be subject and agent, if God is? They all think in terms of the alternatives of free and slave and nowhere seem to consider the authentic Biblical categories of—in the Old Testament—man as vice-gerent, as God's chief executive officer in creation, and its New Testament equivalent, the householder, so frequent in Christ's parables. We must even claim the Gospel image of the 'son', the son of the owner of farm or vineyard who works together with his father, not forgetting that he has said 'All that is mine is yours also.'

When Marx ignores the evangelical concept of man as the 'son' of God who cooperates with the Father, he renders himself also unable to understand a foundational Biblical idea like 'loving the Lord, your God'. To him, loving God, loving a lord is incomprehensible. Indeed it may be if one merely looks at nature deities and fails to recognize the God of history. 'Loving the Lord' indeed is a dialectic which makes [p. 262](#) sense only where there is a presupposition like God's word, 'I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' That is the root of sonship, gratitude, and love: 'When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt' ([Hosea 11:1](#)). Human love is the answer to God's preceding love.

It seems that Marx' criticism pays dearly for setting out from the undialectical rationalism of eighteenth century French atheists, approaching the criticism of religion solely from the angle of nature religion and the gods of thunder and lightning, but ignoring the God of history and the history of salvation, beginning with the experience of Israel. We must insist on this distinction. Nature religion will always be uncertain and ambiguous in that in nature we meet both beauty and terror. A confident understanding of nature can only develop where God has been understood from his work in history where we see him as the Merciful King. In itself, nature can only pose questions and make them pressing.

All this seems to be unknown to the critics, and we are left with a number of abstract, lifeless 'either/ors' which fit the phenomena of neither life nor Christianity, and smack of shortsighted rationalism. In the event, there seems to be more practical freedom under God's sovereignty than under the rule of man. This is indeed a basic alternative. At this point, Christianity declares that atheism and secularism are theoretically and practically unwise, but also unreasonable and perilous.

For one thing, we need to acknowledge God the Creator. Granted, the cosmological and teleological arguments for the existence of God cannot compellingly demonstrate the person of the Creator. But they have much in nature that speaks for them and renders the atheist stance impossible. Also, the current belief that the present sophisticated state of nature is but the result of chance, is highly improbable and seems to demand a credulity that is more irrational than faith in divine creation. Atheists have never really been able to answer the question: Why is it that there is not nothing? We need to acknowledge the Creator. We cannot emancipate ourselves from the physical laws of nature, and we cannot get out of the moral laws built into the world either, without risking the destruction of life.

In addition, we need to be thankful for God the Saviour, for Christ, the great preacher and practitioner of God's own philanthropy. He liberates us from our corrupted past. He is the only Inspirer and Enabler of that change of human nature that creates a new type of person and effects a sustained and practical love for one's neighbour. Christ is also our hope that we will one day attain the eternal destiny of [p. 263](#) man. Christianity can never reduce itself to a this-worldly argument alone.



## CHRISTIAN SELF-CRITICISM AND IDENTITY IN CHRIST

When all this is said and the Christianity of Christ vindicated, we as Christians stand convicted:

—of our own secularism, having ourselves lived as if God did not exist,  
—of the discrepancy between theory and practice in our lives,  
—and of our rationalisations when we ignored man's body for the sake of his soul, or his soul for the sake of his body, and when we ignored love of neighbour allegedly for the sake of love of God, and love of God allegedly for love of neighbour.

Moreover, we stand convicted of our frequent manipulations of Christ's teaching, with the intent to enhance its appeal to our generation, only to see it condemned by the next. We apologise for our zest to accommodate the Gospel to the ruling ideas of any given time and for the damage that this has done to generation after generation. Some of Marx' criticism indeed fits theologians contemporary to him, and others who followed. It does not fit the founder of Christianity. This critique functions proportionately to our distance from Christ. However, although we plead guilty to any rightful criticism of our own conduct, and want to change, we would rather identify with Jesus and have Christianity judged on the merits of his case alone.

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(All numbers in brackets refer to volume and page numbers in Karl Marx—Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, New York [International Publishers, 1975ff.]. Volume 1 contains Marx' writings of 1835–1843, volume 2 those of 1843–44, volume 3 those of 1844–45.) p. 264

## A Declaration of Conscience about the Arms Race

*An Affirmation by the Faculty and and Board of Trustees of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, U.S.A.*

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The continuing world arms race consumes enormous resources worldwide and does not ensure—and indeed may greatly endanger—the future of the human family on God's earth and the continuation of human civilization as we know it. We are compelled, as evangelical followers of Jesus Christ, to rededicate ourselves to the task of peacemaking. In so doing, we join many fellow Christians and urge still others to join us.



We dare to speak our conscience in the trust that God provides discernment to understand his will in such fundamental matters. So we invite Christians in America to reflect with us on the deep spiritual and moral issues that are woven through the costly and frightening arms competition. And we ask our own students, our alumni, and followers of Jesus around the world to join us—the faculty and board of trustees of Fuller Theological Seminary—in the following affirmation.

1. We believe that total war between the superpowers cannot be morally justified.

Traditional Christian judgment on wars has allowed that war can be justified before God only when the evils caused by waging war will be significantly less than the evils that would prevail if war were not used against them. We are persuaded that this condition cannot conceivably be met in armed conflict between the superpowers. Such a conflict between the superpowers would lead to the death of huge segments of the populations of many nations and result in the destruction of most of their cultural treasures. It seems impossible to conceive of a situation that would justify all-out war between the Soviet Union and the United States. What boon could victory bring to either nation?

2. We believe that the present arms competition between the United States and the Soviet Union is dangerously unpredictable with respect to human survival and intolerably expensive with respect to human needs. It must, in God's name, be stopped.

We cannot believe that the present race for military superiority [p. 265](#) ensures either nation's safety. We concede that as long as nations unfriendly to ours have titanic power, whether nuclear or 'conventional', we need power to deter them from using that power in either madness or malice; thus we acknowledge the role that many have played in maintaining our capability of deterrence.

But the uncontrolled arms race offers no predictable assurance for any nation today, while it drains our economies and leaves urgent human needs untended. Ordinary common sense as well as conscience calls out for a controlled end to the weapons race and the reduction of arms and military forces of all types.

3. Though it is only part of the total solution to the dangers of worldthreatening warfare, we believe that the United States and the Soviet Union should give bilateral nuclear disarmament the highest possible priority and pursue it with the vigor and persistence appropriate to a matter that may determine the future of human civilization.

We know that it takes two nations with a mind for peace to negotiate complex arms reduction agreements. We know their values may be different. We also understand the need for reliable verification of both nations' adherence to any agreement.

But we are also aware that pride, fear, impatience, and suspicion can distort perspectives. So we pledge our prayerful support to all those on both sides who determine national positions on the issues and work to negotiate settlements.

Thus we urge our leaders to press now for a bilateral nuclear arms control and arms reduction agreement. We appeal to them to make so complete a commitment that no matter how many valid reasons they may have to be discouraged, or how much cause they have to be suspicious, or how tedious the process, they will be successful in reaching an agreement that will bring about control and significant reduction in the deployment and development of nuclear weapons in our world.

4. We believe that the United States should also pursue aims beyond military deterrence and thus encourage fundamental change in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union.

We refuse to believe that, in a world where God is Lord, our two nations are destined to perpetual hostility. We believe that in God's providence no people need be locked forever within a closed system; we believe that any nation can change. We encourage both sides to respond to human need. We remind ourselves that the Soviet Union is not just a

regime but a people with human longings like our own, a people with a desire for peace as strong as our own, and a people among whom are numbered countless children of God. For the sake of [p. 266](#) these people, as well as for our own sake, we urge our government to create strategies of healing between our people and theirs, to devise ways to help their struggling population, and thus prove the positive strength of an open society and encourage their movement towards openness.

5. We believe that a twofold response to the fearsome arms race is appropriate: (a) a relentless moral address to the present arms competition and (b) a renewed dedication to prayer for peace and for all who work for peace.

With respect to the moral challenge, we believe that Christian people must open their consciences to the cost and danger of our present course. If we believe that God will judge harshly any nation that threatens divine creation with the terrible devices now at human disposal, we must proclaim that belief to the world. With respect to the challenge of prayer, we believe that followers of Jesus Christ everywhere in our world, but uniquely in the Soviet Union and the United States, must exercise their confidence in the efficacy of prayer to a sovereign Lord and, transcending parochial self-interest, must pray fervently for the beginning of a new time of healing among all nations.

## EPILOGUE

We have said these things together as the faculty and trustees of an evangelical theological seminary. Some individuals among us would have wished to say more; others of us would choose slightly different emphases at various places. But we together join in this affirmation as our common testimony. We humbly hope that it may contribute to the communion of prayer and the concert of conscience that people can offer in God's name for peace in our world. [P. 267](#)

# Salt and Light The Christian Contribution to Nation-building

John Stott

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One of the most important questions facing Christians in every country today is this: what values and standards are going to dominate our national culture? Kenyan society is increasingly pluralistic. Christianity, Traditional African Religion, Islam, Marxism, secularism and new religious cults are all competing for the soul of Kenya.

For Christians this is first and foremost an evangelistic question, namely whether Jesus Christ will be given the honour due to his name. For God has super-exalted him and accorded him the supreme place of dignity and authority in the universe. It is God's will that every knee should bow to him, and that every tongue should confess him lord ([Phil. 2:9-11](#)). If this is God's desire, it must be the desire of his people also.

The question, however, has cultural implications also. Will Christians be able so to influence Kenya that the values and standards of Jesus Christ permeate its culture?—its consensus on issues of social morality, its legislation, its administration of justice in the lawcourts and its conduct of business in the market-place, the education of its young people in schools and colleges, its care of the sick and elderly, its respect for the unborn, the handicapped and the senile, its attitude to dissidents and criminals, and the way of life of its citizens? Will Christ be lord of Kenyan culture?

## SALT AND LIGHT: METAPHORS

There can be no doubt that this is the will of Jesus Christ. He expected his followers to go out into the world, both in order to preach the gospel and make disciples, and in order to make their society more pleasing to God by being its salt and light.

‘You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its [p. 268](#) stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.’ ([Matthew 5:13–16](#), NIV).

All of us are very familiar with salt and light. They are two of the commonest household commodities. They are in almost universal use, being found in virtually every home. Certainly everybody used them in the Palestine of Jesus’ day. He will have known them since his boyhood in the Nazareth home. He must often have watched his mother use salt in the kitchen. In those days before refrigeration, salt was the bestknown preservative and antiseptic. It still is, wherever refrigerators are not available. So Mary would have rubbed salt into the fish and meat, or left them to soak in salty water. And she would have lit the lamps when the sun went down.

Now salt and light were the images Jesus used to illustrate the evangelistic and social influence which he intended his followers to exert in the world. He appointed the Twelve as his apostles, and as the nucleus of his new society. Yet he called them ‘the salt of *the earth*’ and ‘the light of *the world*’. What did he mean? A careful study of his statements indicates that he was teaching at least four truths.

## CHRISTIANS ARE DIFFERENT

Both images, salt and light, set the two communities in contrast to each other. On the one hand, there is ‘the world’ or ‘the earth’ which, with all its evil and tragedy, is a dark place; on the other hand, there is *you*, who are to be the dark world’s light. Again, the world resembles rotting meat or decaying fish, but *you* are to be its salt. In English idiom we might say that the two communities are as different as ‘chalk from cheese’ or ‘oil from water’: but Jesus said they are as different as ‘light from darkness’ and ‘salt from decay’.

This is a major theme of the whole Bible, namely that from the wider human community God is calling out a people for himself, and that the vocation of this people is to be ‘holy’, that is, ‘distinct’. ‘Be holy’, he says to them, ‘because I am holy’. A particularly clear statement of this was made to the Israelites soon after the Exodus.

The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: “I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must

obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God”’. ([Lev. 18:1-4](#), NIV)

Thus the people of Israel were to resemble neither the Egyptians nor p. 269 the Canaanites. They were to resist the pressures of the surrounding culture. They were not to accommodate themselves to the prevailing fashions. They were to follow God’s way, not the way of the world. Jesus implied something very similar when he said to his disciples during the Sermon on the Mount ‘Do not be like them’ ([Matt. 6:8](#)). They were to imitate neither the pagans nor the pharisees around them; they were to follow his teaching instead.

It is especially important to stress this distinction today because the current theological tendency is to underplay it. It is not uncommon to hear theologians speak of the whole human community as ‘the people of God’. Highly desirable as it is that all people should be God’s people, it is not however compatible with the teaching of the Bible to say that they are. All human beings are indeed God’s creatures, even his ‘offspring’ ([Acts 17:28](#)), but ‘the people of God’ is an expression reserved in Scripture for those whom he has redeemed, and to whom in solemn covenant he has committed himself.

## **CHRISTIANS PENETRATE SOCIETY**

Although spiritually and morally distinct, the followers of Jesus are not to be socially segregated. On the contrary, the light must shine into the darkness, and the salt must soak into the meat. There is no point in lighting a lamp, Jesus explained, if you then put it under a bowl, a bucket or a bed, or hide it away in a cupboard. The lighted lamp must be put on a lampstand, so that it may fulfil its intended function, namely give light to the people in the house. Just so, the good news of Jesus Christ (who is himself the light of the world) must spread throughout the community, both verbally and visually, both by the articulation of the gospel in words and by ‘your good deeds’ which exemplify the gospel and make it credible, and on account of which people will glorify our heavenly Father.

Similarly, the salt has to be rubbed into the meat, or the meat has to be allowed to soak in salty water. There must be a penetration of the one by the other, or the salt will be ineffective. As the lamp does no good if it is kept in the cupboard, so the salt does no good if it stays in the salt-cellar. ‘Let your light shine before men’, Jesus said. He might equally have said ‘let your salt permeate society’. Yet too many Christians hide away in dark cupboards, and too much Christian salt stays snugly in elegant ecclesiastical salt-cellars. In other words, we remain aloof from society. We do not immerse ourselves in the life of our nation, as Jesus’ metaphors of salt and light indicate that we should. p. 270

An illustration of our evangelical tendency to insulate ourselves from the world is supplied by the traditional advice given to young people who ask ‘what shall I do with my life?’ At least in former generations our reply was often to construct a pyramid of vocations. Perched at the top of the pyramid has been the cross-cultural missionary. ‘If you are really out and out for Christ’, we have said, ‘you will undoubtedly go to another country and culture as a messenger of the gospel. If, however, you are not as keen as that, you will stay at home and be a pastor. Luke-warm Christians will probably become doctors or teachers, whereas if you go into politics or into the media, you’re not far from backsliding’. This pyramid of professions needs to be blown up; it is totally unbiblical. But please do not misunderstand me. It is a wonderful privilege to be a missionary or a pastor, *if God calls you to it*. But we must never give the impression that there is no alternative life-work for fully committed Christians. The truth is that all Christians are called to ministry. ‘Ministry’ (*diakonia*) is a generic word. In order to make it specific, we need to add an adjective like ‘evangelistic’, ‘pastoral’, ‘social’ or ‘political’. There is an urgent need

for more Christian politicians and civil servants, journalists and television producers, business men and women and industrialists, educators, lawyers, playwrights etc, who will penetrate their particular segment of secular society for Christ, and maintain his standards and values without compromise, even in a hostile environment.

## CHRISTIANS INFLUENCE AND CHANGE SOCIETY

Both salt and light are *effective* commodities. They never leave their environment unaffected by their presence. On the contrary, they change it. When you switch on the light, the darkness is dispelled. And wherever the salt permeates, the process of decay is decelerated. If therefore Christians let their light shine before men, we should expect the darkness to diminish. And if they act like salt, we should expect social decay to be hindered.

Why is it then, that human society continues to deteriorate? I cannot speak for Kenya, but I can for England. Materialism abounds. There is increasing racial tension, moral corruption and sexual promiscuity. One in every three marriages ends in divorce. The prisons are so overcrowded that early parole has had to be introduced. And the widespread disregard for the sanctity of human life is evidenced in the two million abortions which have been induced since the 1967 Act legalized them. Who is to blame for this landslide? Let me put it in this way: [p. 271](#)

If the house is dark at night, there is no sense in blaming the house. That's what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is: where is the light? Again, if the meat goes bad and becomes inedible, there is no sense in blaming the meat. That's what happens when the bacteria are allowed to breed freely. The question to ask is: where is the salt? So too, if society becomes corrupt (like a dark night or stinking fish), there is no sense in blaming society. That's what happens when fallen human beings are left to themselves and their selfish tendencies are unchecked. The question to ask is: where is the church? Where is the salt and the light of Jesus? We must therefore ascribe blame where blame is due. It is hypocritical to raise our eyebrows, shrug our shoulders or wring our hands in self-righteous disapproval of the world. Jesus Christ told us to be society's salt and light. If therefore darkness and rottenness abound, it is *our* fault. We need to accept responsibility and repent.

We must also accept with new determination the role which Jesus has assigned to us. The power of God has not diminished. By it human beings can be changed. So can human society. We need to remember the words of Karl Marx: 'The philosophers have only in various ways interpreted the world; the point, however, is to change it'. For it *can* be changed. Not by Marxist revolution, however, but by a deeper and greater revolution, through the gospel of Christ. There are many examples in history of the beneficial social influences of the gospel.

The late Professor K. S. Latourette of Yale University wrote a seven-volume *History of the Expansion of Christianity*. His conclusion includes these words: 'No life ever lived on this planet has been so influential in the affairs of men (i.e. as the life of Christ through his followers).... From that brief life and its apparent frustration has flowed a more powerful force for the triumphal waging of man's long battle than any other ever known by the human race.... Through it hundreds of millions have been lifted from illiteracy and ignorance, and have been placed upon the road of growing intellectual freedom and of control over their physical environment. It has done more to allay the physical ills of disease and famine than any other impulse known to man. It has emancipated millions from chattel slavery and millions of others from thralldom to vice. It has protected tens of millions from exploitation by their fellows. It has been the most fruitful source of



movements to lessen the horrors of war and to put the relations of men and nations on the basis of justice and peace’.

In claiming this, we do not forget the blemishes which have spoiled Christianity’s historical record. Much has been done in the name of Christ of which we are ashamed. Nevertheless, the general effect of [p. 272](#) the gospel through believers has been enormously constructive. We must not underestimate the power which even a small minority can have in society.

This is the theme of Tom Sine’s book *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy* (1981). It is subtitled ‘You can make a difference in tomorrow’s troubled world’. He writes: ‘Jesus let us in on an astonishing secret. God has chosen to change the world through the lowly, the unassuming and the imperceptible’—referring to his likening the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. ‘This has always been God’s strategy—changing the world through the conspiracy of the insignificant. He chose a ragged bunch of Semite slaves to become the insurgents of his new order.... He chose an undersized shepherd boy with a slingshot to lead his chosen people. And who would have ever dreamed that God would choose to work through a baby in a cow stall to turn this world right side up! “God chose the foolish things ... the weak things ... the lowly things ... the things that are not....”. It is still God’s policy to work through the embarrassingly insignificant to change his world and create his future ... just as Jesus used that first unlikely bunch of fishermen....’.

Let me give another example. Robert Bellah is an American sociologist, a specialist in ‘civil religion’, who teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, and in its Center for Japanese and Korean studies. In an interview published in a journal in 1976 he said: ‘I think we should not underestimate the significance of the small group of people who have a new vision of a just and gentle world. In Japan a very small minority of Protestant Christians introduced ethics into politics, and had an impact beyond all proportion to their numbers. They were central in beginning the women’s movement, labor unions, socialist parties, and virtually every reform movement. The quality of a culture may be changed when 2% of its people have a new vision.’

## CHRISTIANS RETAIN THEIR CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVES

The salt must retain its saltiness, Jesus said. Otherwise it is useless. It cannot even be put on the compost heap. It has to be thrown away. Similarly, the light must retain its brightness. Otherwise it does little or no good. Just so, we Christians have to fulfil two conditions if we are to influence society for good. First, we must penetrate it, and secondly we must refuse to become conformed to it. We have to be ‘in it, but not of it’ in Jesus’ wellknown expression. Some Christians live a very upright life, but remain isolated from human society. Others immerse [P. 273](#) themselves in the world, but in so doing become assimilated to it. We have to avoid both mistakes. ‘Penetration without assimilation’ is the principle. Above all, we must maintain our Christian convictions, ideals and standards, and have the courage to be different from the world around us.

What, then, are our Christian distinctives which we must not compromise? What is this Christian ‘light’ which has to shine, and this Christian ‘saltiness’ which has to be retained? The rest of the Sermon on the Mount answers these questions. It paints a portrait of the citizens of God’s Kingdom. Although there is much detail in it which we could consider, I will seek to draw out just three of its main emphases.

First, Jesus calls us to a *greater righteousness*. ‘Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law’, he said, ‘you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of heaven’ ([Matt. 5:20](#)). The disciples must have been dumbfounded by this statement. For the Scribes and Pharisees were the most righteous people in the



community. From their study of the Old Testament they calculated that it contained 613 rules and regulations (248 commandments and 365 prohibitions), and they claimed to have kept them all. Now Jesus said that entry into the Kingdom was impossible without a greater righteousness than theirs. It was unbelievable. How could they possibly be more righteous than the most righteous people on earth? He must be joking. He could not be serious. But Jesus was quite serious. Christian righteousness is *greater* than Pharisaic righteousness because it is *deeper*. The Pharisees were content with an external conformity to the law, while Jesus demanded the radical obedience of the heart. 'Blessed are the pure in heart', he said.

He went on to give two illustrations from the prohibitions of murder and adultery. The law said 'you shall not commit murder', and the Pharisees claimed to have obeyed this commandment, because they limited its application to the deed. But Jesus said that one can commit murder by words of insult and even by unjustified feelings of anger. It was the same with adultery. Jesus insisted that the demands of this prohibition also extended beyond the deed to the eyes of both flesh and fantasy: 'anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' ([Matt. 5:28](#)).

So Christian righteousness is heart-righteousness. It includes those deep and secret places of the human personality which nobody sees but God, and which are usually the last fortress to surrender to his authority. Yet without heart-righteousness we cannot enter the Kingdom, for heart-righteousness is impossible without a new heart, a p. 274 new heart depends on a new birth, and new birth is indispensable to Kingdom citizenship.

Secondly, Jesus calls us to *a wider love*. 'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy"' ([Matt. 5:43](#)). No such words occur in the Old Testament. They are a scandalous misquotation. [Leviticus 19:18](#) said 'love your neighbour as yourself' and stopped there. But this led the Scribes to ask who their neighbour was and to answer by giving themselves a narrow definition, in order to make the commandment easier to obey. Their neighbour, according to their evasive casuistry, was their fellow-Jew, their co-religionist, their kith and kin. Therefore, since it was only their neighbour they had to love, they argued, the law left them free to hate their enemy, and even by implication commanded them to do so. They thus manipulated God's law to justify their racial prejudice and hatred.

But Jesus flatly contradicted them. It was not Moses' law (what stood 'written') with which he disagreed, but the scribal distortions of it (what was 'said'). He insisted that the command to love thy neighbour had no religious, racial or personal limitations. On the contrary, in the vocabulary of God the 'neighbour' includes the 'enemy', as he was later to illustrate in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in which a Samaritan did for a Jew what no Jew would have dreamed of doing for a Samaritan. So, Jesus continued, we are to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors. Only then shall we prove ourselves to be authentic children of God, for he gives his good gifts of rain and sunshine to the evil as much as to the righteous. His love is all-embracing, and ours must be too.

In the world outside the Kingdom community people love those who love them. Parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and friends love each other. It is not necessary to be born again to experience that kind of love. 'Even sinners love those who love them' ([Lk. 6:32](#)). Reciprocity is the standard of the world. 'You do me a good turn, and I'll do you a good turn; you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours'. But it is not a high enough standard for God's Kingdom. If all we can do is love those who love us, we are no better than pagans. 'What are you doing *more* than others?' Jesus asks ([Matt. 5:47](#)). Instead of copying the world, we are to copy God. 'Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (v. [48](#)).

Now our enemy is the person who is after us with a knife or a gun, or who is resolved to rob us of something more precious than life itself, namely our good name. Our enemy is one who has mounted a smear campaign of lies and slander against us. How are we to respond to his evil? We are to love him, to seek his welfare, to pray for him, and to do p. 275 him good at the very time when he is seeking to do us harm. As one commentator has expressed it, to return evil for good is the way of the devil, to return good for good and evil for evil is the way of the world, but the way of Christ is to return good for evil.

Thirdly, Jesus calls us to *a nobler ambition*. All human beings are ambitious. Ambition is the desire to succeed in something. The little boy dreams of becoming a pilot or even an astronaut, the little girl of being a hospital nurse or a mother, an adult of becoming rich, powerful or famous. Our ambition is what we 'seek', that is, what we make our goal in life, what we set before ourselves as the supreme good to which we devote our lives. In the end, Jesus said, there are only two alternative goals. We can become preoccupied with food, drink and clothing, that is, with ourselves and our own material comfort. We can keep asking 'What shall I eat? What shall I drink? What shall I wear?' But this is what pagans 'seek'. To be sure, God does not forget our bodily needs. He has given us bodies and told us to pray for our daily bread. But an exclusive preoccupation with ourselves and our bodies is a hopelessly inadequate goal for the disciples of Jesus. Instead, we are to 'seek first God's Kingdom and God's righteousness', and then our material necessities will be given to us as well ([Matt. 6:31-33](#)).

## CALL TO A DOUBLE REPENTANCE

Here then is the summons of Jesus. He calls us to a greater righteousness (of the heart), to a wider love (of our enemies) and to a nobler ambition (God's rule and righteousness in the world). In response, we have need of a double repentance.

First, we must repent of *our compromises*. Jesus sets before us his way and the way of the world, the narrow path which leads to life and the broad road which leads to destruction. And he obliges us to choose. For 'no-one can serve two masters' ([Matt. 6:24](#)), though many of us have a good shot at it. But, he went on, 'You cannot serve both God and Money'. Nor, for that matter, can we share any other idol with the living God. He demands, because he deserves, our exclusive worship.

So let us turn from our half-heartedness, give up our prudential little compromises, and make Jesus lord of every part and department of our life! We lack integrity if we call the world to repent, while not repenting ourselves, if we campaign for social justice, while tolerating injustice in the church, or if we preach the gospel of peace, while acquiescing in discord in the Christian community. Both our p. 276 evangelism and our social action will be credible only if we ourselves are manifestly new, liberated, righteous and fulfilled human beings.

Secondly, we must repent of *our pessimism*. If evangelical hypocrisy is a horrid thing, so is evangelical pessimism. We say we believe in God. Well, faith and pessimism are mutually incompatible. To be sure, we are not starry-eyed idealists. We cherish no foolish dreams of an earthly utopia. For we know well the fallenness of human beings, and that sin is ingrained in human nature and human society. Nevertheless, we also know the transforming power of the gospel and the purpose of God that his people shall be the world's salt and light. It is this that gives us hope.

So, repenting of both compromise and pessimism, we need to offer ourselves humbly to God, to be his new community in the midst of the old, his salt to hinder social decay, and his light to shine in the darkness and dispel it. There is no better way for Christians to contribute to nation-building.

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This article was one of the ACTEA lectures given in E. Africa. It also appears in *Issues Facing Christians Today*. p. 277

## Book Reviews

### FAITH AND CHURCH

D. A. Carson (ed.), [\*Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context\*](#)  
Review article by Ramesh Richard

### CHURCH RENEWAL

Howard A. Snyder, [\*Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom\*](#)  
Review by Joel B. Green in *Themelios* September 1984.

### THEOLOGY OF MISSION

Wilbert R. Shenk, [\*Henry Venn—Missionary Statesman\*](#)  
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## Faith and Church

### BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND THE CHURCH: TEXT AND CONTEXT

*Edited by D. A. Carson*  
(Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1984)  
Pp. 240, Paper £6.95

Reviewed by *Ramesh Richard*

This book is an outgrowth of a 1982 consultation on hermeneutical issues sponsored by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. In spite of the ambiguity of the title (the conjunction 'and' occurs twice and is subject to hermeneutic misconstrual), the monograph is a fine contribution to the general area of the Church in current theological and missiological discussion. Independently, many of the articles are

mature pieces of evangelical scholarship within a wide spectrum of ecclesiological concerns.

The editor's (D. A. Carson, Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) own introductory essay: 'A Sketch of the Factors Determining Current Hermeneutical Debate in Cross-Cultural Contexts,' reinforces his particularly good standing within the evangelical theological community as one who is especially adept at identifying hermeneutical macropatterns. In this very fine descriptive essay interspersed with perceptive questions, he explores five critical problems of current hermeneutical concern: 'Pre-understanding;' 'The New Hermeneutic;' 'Canon within the Canon;' 'Salvation—Historical Development;' and 'Too Little Self-Criticism.' This essay serves both as a basis and introduction to the rest of the book. This reviewer's only disappointment would be the immediate elimination of 'structuralism' as 'not yet a burning issue in the church elsewhere' (p.11) without even noting what could be the influence of a cross-cultural Hinduistic epistemology in the contemporary theological scene—a meta-historical, theological attempt to avoid the transcendent.

With R. T. France (Vice Principal, London Bible College) in 'The Church and the Kingdom of God: Some Hermeneutical Issues,' many evangelicals will share the desire to avoid the illegitimate use of the crucial phrase 'kingdom of God' to suit specific, self-proclaimed agendas dictated by the third horizon, i.e., the interpreter's horizon. [p. 279](#) We also share in his insights concerning the misappropriation of a rich term in applying it to human efforts in bringing about God's kingdom on earth. What, in fact, will be questioned is whether his premise and conclusion '... that Jesus uses 'the kingdom of God' in such a variety of linguistic connections and in relation to such varied subject-areas that it is impossible to identify any specific situation, event or 'thing' which *is* the kingdom of God' (p.38). His premise is that since the kingdom is a general situation, it is not an identifiable situation, while the church is a 'definable empirical entity' (p.31), i.e., specific enough to be identified. Of course, one asks the following questions of this major thrust: (1) Can a general situation be an identifiable situation at all? France argues that only what is Biblically definable is empirically demonstrable. While even this is open to debate, note in this connection the query of the disciples in [Acts 1:6](#): 'Lord, is it at this time (identifiable time), you (divine initiative) are restoring the kingdom (an identifiable situation) to Israel (an identifiable people)?' Jesus did not tell them that they were mistaken concerning the kingdom being 'a universally recognizable empirical state of affairs' (cf., p.34). Jesus and the disciples shared a common definition of this identifiable situation—the form, but not the 'timing' of it. To avoid the current penchant of wresting God's work and putting it into human hands, one does not have to hold to an abstraction that can hardly be recognizable even if God were to accomplish it. The comprehensive kingdom is God's initiative in God's time, general in the present, proleptically demonstrable in the *ecclesia*, and specifically identifiable in the future. France is absolutely correct when he warns us that 'Jesus' teaching is in danger of being lost, and the sovereign work of God turned into human reform programmes' (p.41). Perhaps, in conceding to France's concerns, we must think of 'church' ethics and 'church' action rather than just 'kingdom' ethics and so on, if the term is really just a convenient and undefined catch-word in modern parlance.

Gerhard Maier's (Rektor, *Albrecht-Bengel-Haus*, Tübingen) translated contribution: 'The Church in the Gospel of Matthew: Hermeneutical Analysis of the Current Debate,' raises issues in the relation of content-criticism, subjective biases as hermeneutical pre-determinants, and the consequent denial of the *ἐκκλησία* sayings of [Matthew 16:17ff](#) as part of a larger malaise that afflicts contemporary exegetes. Largely an analytic essay, it demonstrates that the way one approaches Scripture too often influences one's conclusions. Unfortunately, Maier himself, implicitly, falls a prey to his own warnings. For

example, he assumes that the topic of 'the church', 'appears in many passages in Matthew's gospel' (p.46), and lists instances where others would be [p. 280](#) hard-pressed to see anything of 'the church.' Also, it is true that 'vocabulary statistics cannot decide the question' (p. 51), but Maier does not even allow them to influence the question to a decision. Βασιλεία and εκκλησία are different terms. The first occurs about 70 times in Matthew, while the latter occurs 3 times in just two chapters. It is hard to be convinced that there is no significance even to this 'statistical' disparity. A 'hasty generalization' complaint may be lodged against the thesis of this article for confusing 'church' and 'kingdom' categories.

The next article: 'Interpreting the Biblical Models of the Church: A Hermeneutical Deepening of Ecclesiology' by Edmund P. Clowney (Past President and Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary) borders on theological brilliance. It wins first marks as a highly conceptual essay with significant resources for the hermeneutical task in describing the nature of the church as found in the metaphorical language of Scripture. Competent introductory remarks on 'understanding metaphorical language' are followed by a delineation of the 'metaphors for the Church.' The third subsection on 'theological use of metaphors for the church' includes a brief treatise on understanding metaphors through the epochs of the history of redemption. He grapples with the 'typos' phenomena of the Old Testament in relation to the New. He posits the key of understanding the plot line of the Biblical 'typos' in seeing the Old Testament as a model first and then only as an example. This, of course, may be a permissible theological distinction, but it does not seem to square with the priority given to the stated exemplary character of Old Testament events as argued by Paul ([1 Cor. 10:6, 11](#)). Perhaps, this again explains the difficulty Clowney faces in relating the Church to the OT nation in designating the Church as 'the people of God' as being both metaphorical and literal (p.92). By asking for the privileges of a dual description (metaphorical and literal) he opens himself up to the possibility of holding to a separate ontological category when it comes to ecclesiological linguistic phenomena. If one finds the Church in both the Old and New Testament, he has to opt for a literal-metaphorical description in relating OT Israel to the heavenly reality of the Church. The theologian has to forego the privilege of calling OT Israel a model if indeed the nation was the church. It cannot be model and actual in one and the same sense at the same time. Some solve this by maintaining an ontological distinction between Israel and the Church. If, however, one sustains a salvific continuity between the redeemed of 'epochs of redemptive history', but administrative discontinuity between the peoples of God in the Old and New [p. 281](#) Testament,<sup>1</sup> then only does Clowney's later affirmation that 'Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David all participate by faith in that reality, but their history is embedded in the preparatory forms of that time before Christ came' (p.92) make for theological consistency. His concluding section 'Insights for Hermeneutics' draws upon the major discussion and is truly insightful in emphasising the depth of God's revelation as being more than what the human authors of Scripture intended, though some help in avoiding the pitfalls of an obtruse *sensus-plenior* would have been welcomed. This essay itself will justify the biblical theologian's investment in the book.

Another extremely useful essay is P. T. O'Brien's (Vice Principal and Head of the New Testament Department, Moore Theological College, and Lecturer in New Testament,

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<sup>1</sup> Note the anarthrous noun in [1 Peter 2](#): 'a people of God'; i.e., the Church is not defined by salvation only but also in her theological relation to the triune God. No one holds that all Israel was made up of believers, though *all* Israel were the people of God in the Old Testament, in contrast to the Church where the whole Church is made up of believers, the people of God.



University of Sydney), 'Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church.' It excels not only in content, style, exegesis and arrangement of material, but is a good model of exegetically based theological methodology investigating a particular subject. There is a delineation and critique of 7 positions in the history of interpretation on the subject of Pauline powers. A brief analysis of the 'significant hermeneutical presuppositions' of these recent theologians is provided. This is succeeded by a summary of the main New Testament teaching on the powers and the relationship of 'the principalities and structures.' These sections are outstanding briefs on a New Testament Satanology and Demonology. The final part of the paper studies the Christian's responsibilities in light of his conclusion that 'the powers of evil ... are to be regarded as personal, supernatural agencies' (p.141). O'Brien makes explicit what 'third world' theologians have always suspected—that there is an anti-supernaturalistic deference in much of Western (including 'evangelical') approaches to Scripture. Unfortunately, in a desire to be relevant to 'third world' needs (interpreting the powers as including civil authorities and/or ethico-socio-political structures does have an axiological impact on Christians in developing nations), these theologians have ceased to relate to 'third world' world-views (which include angels and demons as part of the infra-structure of life and events). The simple Biblical argument is this: (1) Jesus was subordinate to earthly structures; (2) He was victorious over principalities and power beings (cf., the oft-occurring phrase 'in heavenly places'); (3) [p. 282](#) Therefore, earthly structures cannot be identical to principalities and powers. O'Brien occasionally uses phrases such as 'there is still no consensus among scholars ...' (p.127) and 'the majority of commentators in this century' (p.136) to influence his position, but consensus exegesis is never a sure ground for accepting or dismissing a hypothesis. Yet O'Brien's excellent work is highly commended and commendable in linking exegesis, theology and application.

In a very interesting article, 'The Church in African Theology: Description and Analysis of Hermeneutical Presuppositions,' Tite Tienou (formerly Executive Secretary of the Theological Commission of The Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar), takes four (primarily one) African theologians to task for uncritically equating an African cultural paradigm of kinship structure with a Biblical paradigm—the Church as a Great Family. He appreciates the use of this imagery as a creative attempt at African ecclesiology. But as often, natural analogies are read back into Scripture so that the differences between the analogical paradigms are not noted and in fact diminished. In incorporating ancestors in the Church and implicitly granting them salvation, these African theologians have extended Biblical meaning. As Tienou alerts us: 'Unless it can be demonstrated that the Old Testament, New Testament, and African ideas of family are identical, it seems rather hazardous to select this model as the one suitable for Africa' (p.159). In keeping with Tienou's criticism, it is easy to see that the ambiguous term 'family' is open to multiple definitions causing the African authors to commit a fallacy of equivocation. The reviewer may be permitted to make the following comment. The Universal Church does comprise the living, the unborn and the dead—but with the all-important qualification that they should be 'In Christ'—all ancestors who are dead *in Christ* belong to God's great order of saints.

'The Church in the Liberation Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez: Description and Hermeneutical Analysis' by Emilio A. Núñez (Professor of Systematic and Contemporary Theology, Seminario Teológico Centroamericano Guatemala) synthesizes some of his other writings on the subject, except for the major focus on Gutiérrez here. Núñez is fast becoming a leading evangelical critic of Latin American Liberation Theology. The major limitation he faces, of course, is the paucity of subject matter and Liberation comment on the *nature* of the church. Núñez' theological problems with Gutiérrez include the latter's



uncritical acceptance of European and Marxist sources, a faulty universalist ecclesiology, and an unbiblical reduction of the mission of the church to political involvement. However, the fundamental p. 283 bibliological deficiencies are a weak view of Biblical authority, a lack of serious exegesis of relevant passages, exclusion of basic passages on the subjects, selectivity in choice of Biblical paradigms, and the subordination of the Biblical text to the socio-politico-historical context in determining the Church's identity and mission. This article will enable the reader to get a general picture of the main evangelical concerns with and criticism of Latin American Liberation theology.

The final chapter: 'Social Justice: Underlying Hermeneutical Issues' by Russell P. Shedd (Professor of New Testament, *Faculdade Teologica Batista de Sao Paulo*) attempts to clarify the mission of the church in relation to social justice. It is more a homily than a hermeneutical endeavour, though it has one of the finer, shorter statements of the need for social justice that this reviewer has read. But, alas, the reasons for Christian involvement in justice issues are hardly new or convincing. The Old Testament case for social justice is quite detailed though the undealt hermeneutical problem, of course, is how and if at all the Old Testament injunctions claim and influence the mission of the church today. The reader will appreciate the theoretical articulation of the Old Testament implications for the New Testament with integrity and submission to the text. Shedd concludes with a critique of the hermeneutics of Liberation Theology, the second in a book not particularly on the subject and an indication of the inroads that evangelicals feel that Latin American Liberation Theology has made in the theological world. Also, in the case of a reprint, the editor must note the confusion of footnote sequence on page 201. Yet the contents of many of Shedd's footnotes are insightful and add to the general tenor of his article.

In response to the editor's request, we have attempted an extended review of this book in this journal, an organ of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. It is worth considering owning this book for the following reasons: (1) there are two or three exceptionally fine articles; (2) this is the first evangelical *international* effort in the hermeneutical aspects of the church; and (3) this book is to be a precursor to at least one more round of discussions in articulating a Biblical Theology of the Church and could well become the beginning of a long-standing international dialogue on this most important subject. We encourage the 'Faith and Life' study unity of the WEF theological commission to continue to provide the forum and organization for such interaction.

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## Church Renewal

### LIBERATING THE CHURCH: THE ECOLOGY OF CHURCH AND KINGDOM

by Howard A. Snyder

(Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press 1983)

Pp.288, \$6.95

Reviewed by Joel B. Green in *Themelios*, September 1984

To those interested in, and working towards, the renewal of the church, Howard Snyder should be no stranger. From his pen have come three previous studies—*The Problem of Wineskins* (IVP, 1975), *The Community of the King* (IVP, 1977), and *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (IVP, 1981—each of which were significant contributions to a more mature, biblical ecclesiology. This newest volume follows in the wake of the earlier studies, probing deeply into the purpose and function of the church in the world. According to Snyder, the church's greatest need is 'to be set free for the Kingdom of God, to be liberated from itself as it has become in order to be itself as God intends. The church must be freed to participate fully in the economy of God' (p.11). How the church can be thus liberated sets the agenda for the present book.

For Snyder, the modern church suffers from near-sightedness. It is caught up in the 'church business'—primarily concerned with self-preservation and maintenance of the status quo. Required, then, is a radical re-thinking of the church's purpose and service in God's kingdom. To this end, Snyder employs two key words: *ecology*—descriptive of the essential inter-dependence of all aspects of life on this planet; and *economy*—the ordering or managing of these interrelationships. With these concepts, he drives home the church's purpose to glorify God in submission to his sovereign lordship in his kingdom which encompasses all of creation, and not just 'spiritual affairs'. 'God's plan is a plan for real human history in all its social, personal, political, economic, scientific, and spiritual beauty and ugliness' (p.29). Snyder then proceeds to elucidate bold models for the church and its ministry. To the reader is unveiled in prophetic fashion the responsibilities of the church *vis-à-vis* the poor, the lost, the environment, the systems of society—that is, towards all creation.

In addition to the depth of reflection evident on every page, a major plus of Snyder's work is his ability to be practical in both general and p. 285 specific terms. Importantly, such provisions are made without causing the book to appear as a superficial, 'three easy steps to success' guide. So, the fundamental reorientation and restructuring of the church for which Snyder calls comes across as more than theory. For example, Snyder asserts, 'the church's most potent role as community is in community building' (p.128)—and then goes on briefly to spell out this kind of service in terms of the family, church, and neighbourhood. One might wish, however, that Snyder had specifically addressed the practicalities involved in redirecting the course of theological education and pastoral training; long term, pervasive renewal of the nature he envisions will hardly be possible until changes are made at this level.

Others may find Snyder's study lacking in his presuppositions about the character of ministry. [Ephesians 4:10-13](#), the pivotal passage for Snyder, is certainly important. However, it is debatable whether it outlines *the* New Testament pattern of ministry. How does Snyder deal with the diversity of the New Testament portrayals of church order?

Over-all, *Liberating the Church* should prove a helpful, provoking tool for pastors and church leaders. It contains one of the most balanced discussions to be found on the relationship of the church to the poor and on the role of women in the church. Above all, it will serve as a prophetic word compelling the church to risk itself in the service of the kingdom. It should be noted that the book was written with the American church scene in view; nevertheless, its timely message will benefit a wider audience.

# Theology of Mission

## HENRY VENN—MISSIONARY STATESMAN

by Wilbert R. Schenk

(Mary Knoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1983)

Pp. 175, \$9.95, paper

Reviewed by Bruce J. Nicholls

This carefully researched book is the sixth in the American Society of Missiology Series in collaboration with Orbis Books. It is a biographical study of Henry Venn (1796–1873) ‘the most influential theoretician of mission in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century and the most powerful and authoritative administrator of the largest missionary society within the established Church of England during that century’. (R. Pierce Beaver, p.xi)

The author, Dr. Wilbert R. Schenk, Vice-President of Overseas Ministries of the Mennonite Board of Missions in Elkhart, Indiana, U.S.A. in giving us in a small compass such a perceptive insight into both the depths and comprehension of the vision and ministry of Henry Venn has set a new standard for missionary biographies. Schenk traces the influences that shaped the life and thinking of Venn—the evangelical aristocracy of the Clapham sect with their piety, evangelical conviction and social and political involvement in the anti-slavery movement; the family of which his father was rector of Clapham and one of the founders of the Church Missionary Society; his own student days in Cambridge and his experience as a curate in the Church of England. Involved in the C.M.S. from his early years, Venn held the position of honorary clerical secretary from 1841 for the next 30 years.

This reviewer found the Chapters: Theorist, Strategist, and Administrator most rewarding. Venn devoted more attention to principles than to methods and strategy, contrary to much contemporary missiology. Schenk skilfully summarises Venn’s theological assumptions and his functional principles for the missionary society and its missionaries. In keeping with his age, Venn argued more from theological propositions than from the exegesis of Scripture, though his analysis of the primitive Church in Acts as a paradigm for the missionary Church of all ages is very helpful. At a time when evangelical para-Church missionary agencies are overshadowing Church societies, Venn’s doctrine of the Church and the role of missions in establishing new churches is prophetic. Venn rejected the principles of Francis Xavier which he felt led to nominalism, and also the High Church views on episcopacy of the older Anglican Societies, S.P.G. and S.P.C.K.

Venn’s emphasis on preaching the Word of God, on the local Church and its native culture, on education and self-reliance led to the three-self criteria, of self support, self government and self extending, which is Venn’s best known contribution to missionary theory and practice. Schenk might have given attention to the work of Rufus Anderson of the American Board, whose theory and missionary practice developed along parallel lines. Venn’s emphasis on the role of the missionary as a pioneer and not a pastor is still very relevant today even in countries where the indigenous Church is well established. Prophetically Venn warned against the dangers of racism, paternalism and colonialism, which plagued the next generation of missionaries and their administrators. He saw ‘civilization’ as the consequence of, not the precursor to missionary work, despite his strong emphasis on p. 287 the role of education in missionary work. Unfortunately, Venn failed to convince his own C.M.S. missionaries of the validity of his three-self policies. After his death, British missionaries, in keeping with the new spirit of imperialism, turned away

from indigenization and autonomy to ecclesiastical colonialism and paternalism. Venn left few disciples to carry his vision forward to the next generation of missionaries.

Venn's strength as an administrator, despite the fact that he never visited any C.M.S. missionaries abroad is well outlined. He emphasised tradition rather than bureaucracy—a position that needs to be heeded in an age of high technology and competition for funding of expanding missionary budgets. Shenk devotes one chapter to Venn as an advocate for Africa and the role of C.M.S. in ending the slave trade and another to Venn as a critic of colonial policies in India and New Zealand. In a final chapter on the achievements of Venn, this reviewer would have welcomed a more detailed response to Stephen Neill's criticism of Venn's separation of Church and mission.

The extensive documentation to each chapter largely from archival sources, two extended appendices and 38 pages of bibliography and index are valuable additions to this important work. [p. 288](#)

## **Journal Information**

### *Publications Referred to in this Issue*

#### **Themelios**

Published jointly by the British Theological Students Fellowship and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. 38 De Montfort St., Leicester LE1 7GP, UK, or 233 Langdon Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA. Subscriptions £3.00 UK, \$6.00, Sfr 10.00 (3 issues).

#### **East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology**

Published twice a year by the staff of Scott Theological College. Box 49, Machakos, Kenya. Subscriptions US \$6.00 or £3.25 or Ksh 60. Rate for students studying in Africa, US \$4.00 or £2.25 or Ksh 40.

#### **Occasional Essays**

Published by the Latin American Evangelical Center for Pastoral Studies (CELEP). CELEP, Apartado 1307, San Jose, Costa Rica. Subscriptions Latin America/Caribbean \$4.00, outside Latin America \$6.00.

#### **Evangelical Missions Quarterly**

Published by the Evangelical Missions Information Service four times a year. EMIS Inc., 25W560 Geneva Road, Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. Subscription \$10.00 for one year.